A QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY: AUSTRALIA IN SEATO, 1954-1962

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

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Sandeep Singh

28 November 2016

Acknowledgements

I am a man: little do I last
and the night is enormous.
But I look up:
the stars write.
Unknowing I understand,
I too am written
and at this very moment
someone spells me out.
-Octavio Paz, *Brotherhood*: *Homage to Claudius Ptolemy*

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Abbreviations

ANZAM	Australian, New Zealand, and Malayan Area
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand and United States Agreement
BDCC (FE)	British Defence Coordination Committee Far East
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CMPO	Chief, Military Planning Office
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
DRVN	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAG	Military Adviser's Group
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MPO	Military Planning Office
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PAP	People's Action Party
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RLA	Royal Laotian Army
SEAC	Southeast Asia Command
SEACDT	Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
WO	War Office (documents)

Table of Contents

SUMMARY

The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) had a multifaceted yet brief existence in comparison to its sister organization, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Yet, as recent scholarship demonstrates, the organization can be usefully examined not only for its own sake, but to study broader issues in the Cold War in Southeast Asia, if not more expansively. Australian foreign policy in the Southeast Asian region in the Cold War period has, similarly, provided avenues for analysis but also remains fertile ground for exploring the policies of a power trying to find a greater voice in global affairs while balancing commitments to its traditional allies and expanding its engagement with newly decolonizing states. A study examining Australia's involvement in SEATO in the most active years of the organization's existence, 1954-1962, can bring to the fore and also problematize understandings of decolonization, ideological struggles intertwined with national aspirations, superpower conflict, and the pursuit of an Australian grand strategy objective. Australia consistently pursued the last element, but policymakers and planners at the highest levels did not only channel forward defence through SEATO.

This thesis argues that Australia's involvement in SEATO from 1954 to 1962 can be considered as primarily involved in pursuing legitimacy as an objective. Legitimacy took two forms. One was political legitimacy, which meant emphasizing SEATO as a positive means to defend the integrity of independent territories in Southeast Asia, and communicating

this to an audience at home as well as nations abroad, at times detracting from this view of benevolence. The second form of legitimacy was in regards to the military capability of SEATO and the commitment of military force by Australia, broadly, to it. This latter form meant guaranteeing that SEATO could deter or if necessary defeat threats from communist aggressors in the region.

Legitimacy did not operate as a principle in a vacuum, and the fact that Australia had to engage with multilateral planning through SEATO meant consensus had to be maintained. This was problematic when its powerful allies, the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), envisioned different roles for the organization, and their own involvement in the region, differently from its incipient stages. This did not paralyse the workings of the organization from the start. A serious effort was made to build the organization, in both political and military terms; but planning and assessment were subject to numerous changes on the ground. These changes eventually led to a growing emphasis on counter-subversion, which followed from an initial focus on direct overt communist invasion. While such an emphasis was reflected in planning, and while Australian efforts to make such plans credible were serious, a failure of consensus embodied through the neutralization of Laos, and the Rusk-Thanat agreement of March 1962, meant that Australia had to pursue other means to meet its objective of forward defence. SEATO's loss of consensus did not spell a fait accompli in terms of compromising Australian strategic objectives.

List of Figures

Introduction

In the years following the Second World War, Australian politicians and policymakers sought to engage constructively in world affairs through a variety of initiatives, which were in accordance with the ultimate goal of survival and security of the homeland. Australian planners sought to manage their limited means and pursue security through a grand strategy of forward defence. This explains the involvement of Australia in numerous collective defence agreements and treaties, such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Grand strategy can be encapsulated as an endeavour of policy:

> That is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests. It is…an art in the Clausewitzian sense — and a difficult art at that, since it operates at various levels, political, strategic, operational, tactical, all interacting with each other to advance or retard the primary aim.[1]

Australia's approach was developed in an environment transformed in many ways by the Cold War, and the extension of its ramifications through global conflicts subsumed by or related to the bipolar conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, Australian interests were however not solely related to positioning itself in that conflict, but also to forward traditional links with partners such as the

[1] Kennedy, Paul (Ed). *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. p.5.

United Kingdom and New Zealand, and with preserving ties with the Commonwealth. Balancing new responsibilities in an environment with altered global circumstances meant that managing traditional links became modified and complicated by the expansion of the Cold War into Asia, and more specifically Southeast Asia, after 1948. The experience, especially, of armed conflict in the region, with gradual but actual Australian involvement, was in Malaya. This conflict was rightly termed a "localised 'hot war'" by Cheah Boon Kheng.[2] Smaller conflicts not only modified the situation on the ground, but also embodied deeper forces such as ideology, nationalism, aspiration to sovereignty and the decolonization process.

This thesis posits that Australia's involvement in the organization that became SEATO- from its incipient stages as a developing consensus of powers to engage constructively in the region subsequent to the Geneva Agreements of 1954, to a body capable of deterring or if necessary defeating aggression of various forms to what became the "Treaty Area," and to its eventual lack of action and consensus in 1962- was a constructive means to mitigate and manage the forces of ideology, nationalism, aspirations towards sovereignty and decolonization in Southeast Asia. Australia also sought an organization that could help it achieve its end of forward defence; but its involvement in the organization, as well as the organization itself, had to be "legitimate." Legitimacy was a key concern to Australian involvement in the region

[2] Cheah, Boon Kheng, "The Communist Insurgency in Malaysia, 1948-1989: Was it due to the Cold War?" In Murfett, Malcolm H. (ed.), *Cold War Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2012, p.31.

through SEATO, in two principal ways. First, legitimacy would need to embody political dimensions, which meant the organization appeared viable and constructive to genuine nationalist aspirations in the management of decolonization, as well as embracing Asian powers. It would also need to communicate political legitimacy to a domestic audience that wanted to safeguard traditional links but not become involved in conflicts that could appear as actions that suppressed genuine "Asian" aspirations towards freedom. Second, legitimacy would have to encompass military realities, and the management of the Australian armed forces contribution to both SEATO and the region, in the light of other pre-existing commitments and alliances, such as the Australia, New Zealand and Malaya strategic planning agreement (ANZAM) and the Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS). To Australian planners, military legitimacy meant not just the use of their armed forces but also how they were used in Southeast Asia, and developing the military capabilities of SEATO to achieve the broader strategic objective of keeping the fight away from Australian shores. In short, it was a means to the end of forward defence.

Two related concerns, this thesis will demonstrate, are arguably the most important factors in shaping, formulating and executing plans to meet the goal of forward defence through presenting SEATO as a legitimate means to do this. These are timing and overlaps. Timing and overlaps relate directly to the aims and aspirations of Australian politicians and policymakers. Timing meant getting information and

updates on other actors' intentions and capabilities, as well as keeping up with the greater powers that became the most important military and diplomatic link to Australia: the UK and the US. Timing was also a way to manage change effectively, by trying to influence developments on the ground in Southeast Asia. Overlaps involved management of different capabilities in ways that efficiently marshalled resources in a pragmatic way to reinforce regional commitments and keep an eye on developing capabilities. Overlaps also allowed the management of personnel, and enabled Australian officials to link differing alliance and force commitments.

The thesis will deal primarily with the period from 1954 to 1962, which encompassed SEATO's most active years as a platform to plan the defence of the region. While other scholarly accounts focused on longer time periods, this thesis has chosen SEATO's most active years, because this yields insights not just into the policies of a power looking to engage more actively in the Cold War after 1945, but also into the Cold War and its expansion into Southeast Asia. This was a time when space was constantly the object of contest, not just in terms of defining national identities and anticolonial wars of decolonization, but also in terms of how planners outside the region sought to define, categorize and deal with threats in the region. This yields insights into conflicts and tactics, but also how planning for scenarios that did not occur can still teach us a great deal about what actually did. In this sense, the numerous conflicts and configurations of sovereignty from 1954 to 1962 are worth examining

to understand a period that demonstrated the growing Cold War in the broader Asia-Pacific area, and expand our knowledge of regional defence in a time of nationalist aspirations.

No single monograph has tried to deal with Australia's role in SEATO between 1954 and 1962. This thesis employs a largely document-focused study of memoranda, correspondence, reports and speeches by Australian politicians and officials, relying on declassified documents available after the Cold War period. It employs an empirical approach to its survey of developments, but does not claim to present a full narrative of Australia in SEATO in those years. Instead, the approach revolves around the study of SEATO to understand Australian grand strategy in the period. Hence, the narrative offers an appraisal of these themes, and cannot by definition be a complete survey of Australian grand strategy in those years, or an appraisal of all the developments in SEATO in those years, or all the developments in global affairs in the time frame. The sheer volume of material is a reminder of how the historian of the Cold War, and especially one privileged to access the well-organized and collated materials of Australia, must be both cautious and judicious. In fact, volume should not be confused with analytical quality, though, of course, the materials tell the story. The empirical approach remains an important guide even as the field of the Cold War embraces new conceptual frontiers, and a document focused study that is also analytically rigorous can tell us new stories (for after all, we exist in Cleo's shadow) that pose new questions about seemingly old problems.

Literature Survey

Since this study uses a primarily empirical approach, a discussion of methodologically similar works will open a review of extant literature. Empirical studies of the Cold War have helped us find new ways to read how things happened, and may shed positive or negative light on the policies pursued by superpowers or other actors, some of which focus on Southeast Asia.[3] These expand our knowledge base and de-centre the Cold War from grand narratives of superpower conflict, because they amplify and shed light on the periphery. However, peripheral perspectives do not negate the need for a broader bipolar appreciation of the conflict. Studies on the Cold War in Asia and Southeast Asia are growing, not just political histories of regionalism but in the realm of culture too.

When it comes to studies of Southeast Asia in the Cold War, the volume *Cultures at War: the Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* edited by Tony Day & Maya Liem, plus volumes by Malcolm Murfett, Albert Lau, Christopher Goscha & Christian Ostermann and others have brought this regional focus to the global conflict and its various manifestations, and charted new possibilities for scholars, by opening avenues for conversation and debate on a topic that was previously dealt with in terms of conflicts (Vietnam War) or country-specific studies.[4] Day & Liem's volume is the most compelling reading,

[3] For an example of this see Kahin, George & Audrey. *Subversion as Foreign Policy.* New York: New Press, 1995.
[4] Murfett, Malcolm, *Cold War Southeast Asia*; Lau, Albert, *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*, New York: Routledge, 2012; Christopher E. Goscha & Christian Ostermann (eds.), *Connecting Histories: Decolonization*

because it examines the cultural dimension of a conflict usually associated with geopolitics, but also has nuanced appraisals of how the lines between cultural expression overlapped, came into conflict with, and worked parallel to global and local politics. Day's essay "Still Stuck in the Mud: Imagining World Literature During the Cold War in Indonesia and Vietnam"[5] is worth examination. In the chapter, Day locates literature worlds in Southeast Asia that flowed with potential for future artistic possibilities, which "some might have said that the contours of a new world literary space were becoming visible from the Indonesian city of Bandung" where, in the view of one writer, Paris was the province, while Indonesia was the centre of the literary world he inhabited. Global artistic imaginations became repackaged and understood through the idiom of nationalism. This process of reimagining global links is central to "newer" possibilities of reading the Cold War in Southeast Asia, precisely because actors — be they novelists or diplomats, or reporters — gave meaning to, and derived meaning from, understandings of regionalism.

These works coincide, but are not necessarily related, with scholarship on the Cold War now more commonly known in academic language as "the new Cold War," which has revised older approaches to the Cold War. The older approaches can be seen as, broadly speaking, traditional studies on diplomatic history, the history of foreign policy, and

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and the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009; Day, Tony & Liem, Maya H.T (eds.), *Cultures at War: the Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia*. Ithaca, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2010.

[5] Day, Tony, "Still Stuck in the Mud: Imagining World Literature During the Cold War in Indonesia and Vietnam". In Day & Liem, *Cultures*

military history.[6] A very basic definition of this newer approach is that it is now multi-archival and multi-lingual, while also open to interdisciplinary and multicultural influences. John Lewis Gaddis in his influential book *We Now Know* laid out an important opening salvo in this direction. But he dedicates only one chapter to the newer possibilities for methodology and for most of the book criticizes Josef Stalin for starting the Cold War, based on new evidence.[7]

While the role of Stalin is not insignificant in the debate on the origins of the conflict, the Cold War as a subject of academic inquiry has, as pointed out by recent articles by scholars such as Frederico Romero, expanded beyond this "interpretations" debate on the origins of the conflict.[8] O.A. Westad, Christina Klein and Jeremi Suri, to name a few, have tried to expand traditional understandings of the conflict.[9] Westad's edited volume *Reviewing the Cold War* is a compilation of prominent historians' essays on new directions in Cold War studies,[10] but it preceded efforts of scholars such as Klein to read Cold War grand strategies such as containment as US policy as "structures of feeling," by examining texts such as *Reader's Digest.* This suggests that grand strategy was an

[6] For students more exposed to interdisciplinary studies and other fields of history inspired by the cultural turn and other developments, the Cold War is a late arrival when it comes to shifting away from an empirical approach.
[7] Gaddis, John Lewis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
[8] Romero, Frederico, "Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads". *Cold War History*. 14: 4, 2014.
[9] Westad, Odd Arne (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*. London: Frank Cass, 2000; Klein, Christina, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*; Suri, Jeremi, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
[10] Westad (ed.), *Reviewing*.

invention not merely of policymakers but also of those involved in creating a middlebrow imaginary.[11]

In many ways, the traditional empirical method associated with studies on the Cold War is being adapted, not least by scholars trying to incorporate conceptual and cultural perspectives and ask how the Cold War was experienced. This point is expressed by Westad in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War* series, where he points out this new concern of scholarship.[12] After all, the questions we ask of the past are often contemporary, and follow trends in broader historiographical and humanities scholarship. Heonik Kwon, an anthropologist, asked about the historiography on the end of the Cold War in his book *The Other Cold War* which suggested that current scholarship takes the year 1989 as a fait accompli as the end of the Cold War as a conflict, but instead argues that there was no such thing as *the* Cold War in the first place and seeks new possibilities to give voice to the global periphery.[13] This is because the periphery can be read as a "death world" in which the conflict was most explicitly experienced in terms of casualties. While Kwon's book is conceptually rich, it often misses the wood for the trees, preferring to critique thinkers such as Arjun Appadurai or Dipesh Chakrabarty in an extended survey without really exploring the idea of rescuing the memories of those who suffered from oblivion at the end of the 1980s. That said, Kwon's questioning of the legitimacy of chronology is

[11] Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*.
[12] Leffler, Melvyn P. & Westad, Odd Arne (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*: *Volume 1 Origins*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. See in particular Chapter 1 of that volume.
[13] Kwon, Heonik, *The Other Cold War*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

stimulating to a scholar delimiting his work chronologically as a period in the Cold War: perhaps these are too rigid lines imposed arbitrarily on an idea that suggests continuities which defy this formulation? What the new directions also suggest is a broadening of the scope of sources that can be used as a primary base for studies examining various aspects of the conflict. This relates to the shift away from a document source-based approach towards other bases.

Historical writing on Australian involvement in Southeast Asia has tended to be structured around obligations in military conflicts, notable exceptions being Australia and Indonesian independence and the political fates of East Timor and West New Guinea.[14] One could simplify conflicts to involvement in Malaya and Vietnam as the two major examples. Peter Edwards was appointed as the "Official Historian of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts" and this has turned into a nine-volume series that deals with politics and includes specific studies on different "arms" of the armed forces. Of these, two volumes stand out to the reader more interested in grand strategy, diplomacy and politics, rather than operational histories: *Crises and Commitments: the Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965* and *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and*

[14] Examples of this include George, Margaret, *Australia and the Indonesian Revolution*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980; Reid, Anthony & O' Hare, Martin, *Australia and Indonesia's Struggle for Independence*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1995. Dorling, Philip (ed.) *Diplomasi Australia & Indonesian Independence: Documents 1947*. Canberra: Australian Government Pub., 1994; James Cotton, *East Timor, Australia and the Regional Order: Intervention and its Aftermath in Southeast Asia*. New York: Routledge Courzon, 2004.

Diplomacy During the Vietnam War 1965-1975.[15] These are most relevant to this study, and will appeal to the non-specialist reader. They are useful resources, especially when searching for further avenues to explore, because they are specific to Australian regional commitments at the time.

It is no exaggeration that dominant narratives on Australian foreign policy in the period are more focused on how policymakers developed their own approaches to the Cold War;[16] but just because they do not deal explicitly with the region does not mean that the accounts of prominent politicians, the diplomatic service and the press are not helpful.[17] The Cold War period was important in terms of shaping a national consciousness for Australia, complicating the relationship between the traditional allies in the US, UK, Commonwealth and Asian powers. While they gained political independence before the Second World War, the period that followed tested the vitality of prior links and affinities between these polities and their sponsors — most explicitly, the UK. Imperial legacies, pivots towards US security guarantees, and involvement in Southeast Asia, more controversially in Vietnam, all contributed to finding an independent "national" voice. The key term here,

[15] Edwards, Peter & Pemberton, Gregory, *Crises and Commitments: the Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvements in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992; Edwards, Peter, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society, and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1997.

[16] That is to say, trying to examine an independent Australian foreign policy. A good example is David Lowe. *Menzies and the Great World Struggle: Australia's Cold War 1948-1954*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999.

[17] Beaumont, Joan et al. *Ministers, Mandarins and Diplomats: Australian Foreign Policy Making, 1941-1969*. Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2003; Bell, Coral. *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993; Schreuder, Deryck M & Ward, Stuart (ed.) *Australia's Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; Lowe, Peter. *Menzies and the Great World Struggle: Australia's Cold War, 1948-1954.* Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999

however, is "finding": there is no such thing as *the* national voice; there are many types of voices that characterize this, and this panoply invites a nuanced appraisal of its various articulations and manifestations. The extensive literature that deals with domestic politics is complemented by various comparative studies of foreign policy, one of which is Ronald Frankum Jr.'s work on Australia and the US and Vietnam, titled *Silent Partners*.[18] Emphasizing the interdependence between US policy and Australian presence in the conflict, Frankum demonstrates how the notions of asymmetry usually associated with coalition warfare need to be more nuanced when approaching this particular relationship.

The focus of Australian writing on Vietnam merits attention, but more importantly alludes to the impact of Vietnam on Australian society, and its importance in the modern history of the nation. Unfortunately, however, most attention on this conflict obscures the focus on interaction and involvement in Southeast Asia otherwise, of which Vietnam is an important yet protracted part.[19] This thesis seeks to address this, by telling the story of Australia in SEATO after the First Indochina War.

Finally, scholarly accounts on SEATO have been few and have tended to focus mainly on the effectiveness of the organization as a whole, in a broader debate over its salience as a significant force for deterrence in the Cold War. Leszek Buszyinski's *SEATO*: *The Failure of an Alliance*

[18] Frankum, Ronald Bruce Jr, *The United States and Australia in Vietnam, 1954-1968: Silent Partners*. Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2001.
[19] Millie, David, *Team 19 in Vietnam: An Australian Soldier at War.* Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2013. Doyle, Jeff, Grey, Jeffrey, & Pierce, Peter, *Australia's Vietnam War*. College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2002.

Strategy is titled tellingly and focuses on the reasons for the organization's ineffectiveness.[20] Damien Fenton's monograph *To Cage the Red Dragon*: *SEATO and the Defence of Southeast Asia 1955-1965* is a recent rejoinder to the debate,[21] using archival material declassified after the Cold War period to argue that the organization could indeed deter, and if not defeat, aggression in the years he chose to focus on. Other scholarly works incorporate SEATO into broader studies of regional concerns, but apart from Mark Pearson's work on New Zealand's role in the organization,[22] one is pressed to find a significant account of a national involvement in SEATO, especially if one wishes to consult a study that is not contemporaneous and hence probably does not incorporate declassified material.

Chapter Division

Chapter 1 examines the role of Australia in the world after 1945 and its engagement with alliances as a way to advance its strategic interests in Southeast Asia and more broadly. It evaluates Australian involvement in the establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in the initial years of its existence. It shows how Australian officials were concerned with managing change in Southeast Asia by developing a "legitimate" organization in tandem with other regional and global players.

[20] Buszynski, Leszek, *SEATO*: *The Failure of an Alliance Strategy*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983.
[21] Fenton, Damien, *To Cage the Red Dragon*: *SEATO and the Defence of Southeast Asia 1955-1965*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2011.
[22] Pearson, Mark Julius, *Paper Tiger*: *New Zealand's Part in SEATO, 1954-1977.* Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 1989.

Chapter 2 discusses the years 1956 to 1959 and the development of SEATO into a "legitimate" deterrent, and demonstrates that while Australian planners sought to align their interests with the organization and its development, broader problems of consensus hindered but did not fatally cripple the ability of SEATO to meet threats.

Chapter 3 looks at the growing problems of finding a consensus in SEATO, culminating in the failure to implement Plan 5 and the neutralization of Laos, and how SEATO became a necessary but insufficient platform for Australia to pursue its grand strategy. In this respect, Australian grand strategy used SEATO as a means, but it was not the only means, and so its strategic imperatives were not radically altered by lack of action due to a failure to forge consensus.

Chapter 1: Australia and the Formation of SEATO

This chapter discusses the role of Australia in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) from 1954 to 1956. These were the formative years of the organization, when its apparatus was created in terms of both the development of a treaty text following an agreement to collective defence, and the processes that determined the nature and scope of the articles in the text. In addition, the apparatus refers to the nascent but not insignificant structure of the organization, its development of a headquarters in Bangkok, and the relevant political, military and social components formalized in this period. This was a time of intense activity for the organization and its members.

Australia's role in this period marked a serious and sustained engagement with the development of the organization, concerned with two related notions of legitimacy — one which meant that SEATO could be both morally and politically well founded; the other that its military organization could be credible to both friends and foes. Neither of these was a fait accompli, but instead evolved through contingent processes. Neither Australian grand strategy, nor SEATO's goals, was a fixed reality at this time.

The pace of events was to dictate the ability of Australian, no less than other, officials to influence and perhaps shape the developments in SEATO's formation. This gives rise to a theme that will play out in this chapter, that of the importance of timeliness, not just being abreast of

but acting with the information provided and communicated at particular junctures. This is relevant in forwarding the agenda of a middle power, looking for a way to mitigate concerns over great power security guarantees alongside the imperative to engage productively with Asian and Commonwealth partners. Thus, the appearance of timeliness need not be confined to memorandums, and conduct of diplomatic and defence officials, but extended to such conduct in broader, sometimes public forums.

Similarly, with its limited resources and growing international responsibilities on a collective basis, Australia had to marshal military and other resources in an effective way, requiring caution, but not excluding the possibility of making greater contributions to fulfil ambitious Cold War obligations. This attempt at pragmatic yet determined management meant overlaps, and this will be examined in terms of how these overlaps came to be formulated, and what issues they raised. The actions of Australia in these years were contextualized broadly by those of others, so a study such as this must consider the broader international environment of the Cold War, and trace how Australia tried to enhance security, primarily, national security, by charting a course in, and responding to, events and situations associated with ideological conflict — and, importantly, its spread into Asia and the Pacific.

As will be shown, a focus by Australia on conflicts in Southeast Asia was not necessarily a given, even though geographical proximity may make this appear so at the end of the Second World War. Similarly, a

foreign policy apparatus in development meant that decisions were often as much a result of individual players and responses to events as they were grounded in national principles. Australia established its first overseas diplomatic missions, other than to the UK, only in 1940.[23] Finally, the decision to engage in collective security arrangements such as the Canberra Pact, the Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS), the Australia, New Zealand and Malaya plan (ANZAM) and SEATO, does not intimate a policy that emphasized multilateral arrangements from the start.

Alliances are often more than the sum of their parts. This chapter will lay out the argument that Australia's engagement with SEATO in the incipient stages of the organization from pact to structure was one of proactive engagement, in trying to balance its relationships with primarily the US and the UK, as well as other, but select, Asian and Commonwealth states. The dynamic that this presented was that these relationships would need to be structured around two major themes — assistance and deterrence. The complicating factor is the different readings of the balance between the two, not least through organizations such as SEATO. SEATO provides not merely an apt metaphor but a direct demonstration of an organization that tried to present a deterrent but also assist in developing the principle of freedom and governments aspiring to it. This dynamic did not just concern the Australian planners in this period but

[23] Beaumont (et. al) *Ministers*, p. 2.

became one of the key issues faced by the organization in the years that followed.

Australia, during the Second World War and immediately after, was strongly linked to the UK, not least through imperial defence and associations such as the Sterling Area. The Sterling Area saw the development of a system of imperial preference, where the UK "gave preference to the agricultural products of the dominions in return for which the dominions replaced some of the industrial goods they brought from foreign countries with British goods".[24] While Australian relations with the UK may have fluctuated due to events such as the Fall of Singapore, it should not be assumed that the Australians "would stand by and allow Britain to face the German onslaught alone."[25] This meant that although Australia had growing autonomy in the interwar years, Prime Minister Robert Menzies could still declare war without consulting either parliament or Cabinet. The only form of parliamentary contention at the start of the Second World War was concerned with how to meet local defence obligations in the broader overall constellation of imperial defence. Thus, the issue was about allocation of materiel and personnel in the face of a defence guarantee, given the possibility of British inability to implement the Singapore strategy; set against sending troops outside Australia. Thus, the debate in the early stages of the war did not concern the traditional link with London, but rather the appropriate allocation of

[24] Lee, David. *Search for Security: The Political Economy of Australia's Postwar Foreign and Defence Policy*. Canberra: Allen & Unwin, 1995. p.6.
[25] Grey, Jeffrey, *A Military History of Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.141.

resources to meet the aggressor and defend the realm. This meant being a partner taking direction from the UK in terms of overall war strategy.

Australia involved itself, as Jeffrey Grey notes, between Poland and Pearl Harbor in a manner that can be described as "steady but unhurried." Force contributions to campaigns in the early stages to the Mediterranean reaped experience and successes. While the years from 1941 ushered in divergences and disagreements between Australian military evaluations and British assessments, Australian involvement in Greece accumulated experience fighting both Germans and Italians (among other forces), but importantly, prepared it to meet a possible challenge by the Japanese. The events that unfolded, especially with the Japanese thrust southward rather than northward, included the embargo on Japanese oil supplies which led to an advance on the Netherlands East Indies. What the shift in focus towards the Pacific demonstrated was not the lack of intent by London to come to the aid of its peripheral partner, but its inability to do so because of other pressing concerns.[26]

This inability, and the underpinning weakness of the strategy that led to it, can be seen in what is known as the Singapore strategy, which "always depended on the situation in Europe being under control."[27] As Farrell puts it:

"The 'Singapore strategy' was not in fact a realistic grand strategy for war against Japan. It was an optimistic plan to shift the main fleet to the Far East if war approached, followed by a collection of vague ideas

[26] See Grey, *Military History of Australia*, pp.160-191.
[27] Farrell, Brian P., *The Defence and Fall of Singapore, 1940-1942*. Singapore: Monsoon Books, 2015. p.67.

about how it might wage war if it arrived intact. All overlooked the fatal flaw: the base would not be large enough to support a fleet strong enough to pursue any plans for a Phase II and III, even if one was sent."[28]

In February 1942, events exposed the flaw in the strategy. This not least undermined faith in the British guarantee to secure Australia, but also reinforced the need to protect Australia's shores against the threat of Japanese invasion. This marked a shift to Australia devoting "almost all her attention and energies to the war against Japan". While MacArthur refused to allow the Australian divisions to operate as a single corps under its own commander, and did not appoint senior Australian officers to his staff, this was less a demonstration of Australian ability than it was a reflection of other wartime priorities. Australia had a naval guarantee subsequent to the Coral Sea battle in 1942 by the US, and on the ground, Australia inflicted "on Japan her first ground defeat of the war" in Papua and New Guinea. While the skill and determination of the Australians did not change the course of the war, the experience of combat and the effect of Japanese shelling of Sydney and Newcastle, as well as the bombing of Darwin, underlined the importance of securing the Australian homeland after the war.[29]

Amry and Mary Vandenbosch claimed, in their 1967 study of the engagement of Australia with the Southeast Asian region, that the Fall of Singapore and world events immediately after the war led Australia to

[28] Ibid. p.27.
[29] Robertson, John, *Australia at War 1939-1945*. Melbourne: Heinemann, 2001.

turn to the US for support, and it "generally moved steadily closer to the United States, supporting United States and Pacific policies to the point of committing combat troops to Vietnam." This was in part due to concerns over security that Australia was "a western people living in an unstable Asian region." This had more to do with prospects of a Chinese advance into Southeast Asia.[30] They are right to point out the fears over the security, as well as its potential source(s), but seem to embrace the idea that a shift to the US had its roots from 1942. This seems less convincing. It also serves as an instructive entry point into tracing how Australia engaged the region and more broadly with powers such as the UK, the US and emerging Asian nations. But a reasonable understanding of middle power status lends itself to a more sophisticated reading of Australian efforts in the postwar period. Garfield Barwick, speaking in 1964, tried to trace the meaning of "middle power" and what it described when talking about the Australian case: "It has common interests with both the advanced and underdeveloped countries … it has a European background and is set in intimate geographical propinquity to Asia."[31]

The ANZAC Pact, or Canberra Pact, marked an important moment in the growth of an ambitious Australian aspiration to have a voice in the world after the Second World War. It emphasized two key factors. First, actions by individuals in government rather than broad collectives often made the difference in the Australian foreign policy establishment, not

[30] Vandenbosch, Amry & Mary. *Australia Faces Southeast Asia : The Emergence of a Foreign Policy*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967, pp.5-8.
[31] Ibid. p.10.

least by ministers such as H.V. Evatt, to whom it was important not only to associate with the structures of a postwar international system, best represented by the United Nations, but also to influence it on the regional level, in the form of defence and other links. From this perspective, it is not surprising to trace an Australian role in collective security in the postwar world. But this did not mean that engagement in any collective security structure was a given in the Cold War years. Second, the pact gave an incipient shape to Australian intentions to engage in regional "policing", a term used in the agreements. The pact signalled a growing interest in regional responsibilities, but was more an aspiration than a documented change in overall policy.

Evatt's role in forging the Canberra Pact was extended into 1945 when he outlined the dual roles through the UN Organization of fostering peace by encouraging "political, social and economic development, but also by providing military security". This was important not just for the faith he placed in the institution of the UN but also how the organization would be a way for Australia to play a role in global security. In 1946, then PM Ben Chifley "issued a directive to the departments of Defence and External Affairs on the basis of their planning for Australia's defence and national security", which was to be undertaken under the auspices of the "the United Nations, British Commonwealth defence, and local defence, in that order."[32] Evatt's vision, and more broadly the aspirations of the

[32] Edwards, Peter (et al.) *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992. p.7

Chifley administration, were qualified by the realities of the postwar situation, and the presence (perhaps persistence) of historical links which constrained their ability to be more autonomous in policymaking. This did not mean the Australians altogether agreed with the British, even as Labour in the UK was in charge, and they diverged importantly on regional security. While the UK wished to pursue a "centrally co-ordinated system of Commonwealth defence," the Australians preferred a decentralized approach. The memories of wartime failure in Singapore, with the prospect of a new threat from Japan, contoured this approach. When it came to Southeast Asia, however, they found consensus relating to the potential to develop markets in the region.

Australian aspirations in the UN might have continued well into the future, but the realities of the veto, being in the hands of the permanent members of the Security Council and possibly stifling action based on their interests, certainly made this problematic. Similarly, Australia had to temper aspirations towards regional defence away from the UK's broader vision of Commonwealth cooperation, in the person of Frederick Shedden. Secretary to Department of Defence, Shedden felt that Australia should continue to align its policies with the UK and into 1947 Australia's Chiefs of Staff found a similar tone in stating the importance of Commonwealth defence cooperation; reliance "upon the United Nations for security" would be insufficient as there was yet no proof to substantiate such faith.[33] Statements of intent came to bear on the broader framework of

[33] Edwards, *Crises,* pp.12-13.

the Cold War, and Australian policymaking within it, and this meant trying to manage the overarching problem of securing the nation while maintaining collective security obligations.

Parallel to commitments to defence, the Sterling Area provided opportunities as well as issues for security. Security can come to describe an economic concept too. Lee takes this further by suggesting that Australia in the postwar years undertook a "search for security which embraced the economic well-being of the country as well as its politico-strategic security". Interestingly, Lee suggests that while current scholarship on Australian foreign policy may indicate a shift closer to the US, in fact, "Australia moved closer to the United Kingdom," not least due to the Sterling Area. Nonetheless, Lee takes the view that the period was "essentially a dialogue with Great Britain and the United States".[34] While the notion of such a dialogue is important, this should not exclude the interest Australia took in dialogue with smaller and emerging powers, for example its work on Indonesian independence, discussed below. Multilateralism in the form of international organizations and principles was promising, but the US did not seem interested in pursuing this towards a broader objective of international economic reconstruction. Thus, by 1947, the incumbent Labor administration had to move towards strengthening its association with the UK in economic terms. Australia in the wake of war had to pursue stability policies. In economic terms after 1947, this meant "trying to become independent of dollar supplies, to

[34] Lee, *Search* pp.5-6.

promote intra-sterling area trade, and to develop Australia's economy with British and Australian capital."[35]

Meanwhile, the UK tried to manage the effects of wartime economic stresses, which meant accepting Marshall Plan aid, while maintaining some form of Sterling Area vision. One example in 1947 entailed the formation of a "Sterling autarky including the colonies, Australia, New Zealand and possibly Denmark". The problem was really the reluctance of the US to bolster the Sterling Area as a whole with Marshall aid dollars. Australia and New Zealand were technically allowed to convert unlimited amounts of sterling into dollars. While drawing from this dollar pool in the Sterling Area would reduce Britain's basic reserve, Australia made a case to do this as "the bulk of their exports of primary products was going to the United Kingdom and could not easily be diverted to North America to earn dollars"[36]

For Australia, an organizing principle other than the simple fact of geographical proximity to Southeast Asia was the need to protect itself from potential or actual threats arising from events in or from the region. Proximity does not mean only a sense of contiguity, but can also appear in the form of links such as the global emergence of communist ideology. This should not suggest that Australia or Australians were alien to such an ideology before the Second World War; in fact, as demonstrated by the debacle of the Australian Communist Party and banning it in the wake of

[35] It may be noted here that the subsequent administrations rejected these policies to develop closer relations with the US economy.
[36] Ibid. p.45

the pact between the Russians and the Germans during the war, this was not the case. The Cold War years brought the communist threat to a global superpower level and this had local implications, some of which threatened to become entangled in labour movements, Asian aspirations and threats to national security.

This could be seen in September 1945, when the Australian Communist Party issued a circular on Sydney wharves that warned workers and others of ships being loaded with supplies for the Dutch Army, "with the purpose of waging war against the independence of the Indonesian people … to assist the Dutch in any way is to assist avaricious Dutch imperialism against Indonesian democracy."[37] One should not exaggerate the impact of such sentiments, as the broader Australian public "had little understanding or sympathy for the Indonesians." While the communist-led waterside workers could ban Dutch shipping, the government was careful not to advocate this as policy. This allowed Australia to encourage legitimate nationalist aspirations, while rejecting undue stresses to its relations with other parties. This approach was pragmatic, and the republican leadership nominated Australia to represent Indonesia on the UN Good Offices Committee, where it advocated, through people such as T.K. Critchley, the aspirations of Indonesian freedom. They had Chifley's consistent support in the matter,

[37] Edwards, *Crises,* p.14.

even though there was "strong criticism from the Parliamentary Opposition for failing to support a 'white' ally in the region."[38]

This support was neither unequivocal, nor did it usher in a forgone conclusion of supporting nationalist movements in Southeast Asia, as would be seen in the complex diplomacy surrounding claims by Indonesia itself, in the following years, over New Guinea. The roles of leadership, nationalism and sovereignty were complex and could not be static in a rapidly changing Cold War dynamic. The change in government in Australia in 1949 brought in change in the form of a Liberal-Country party coalition that was initially more supportive of Dutch claims than Labor's more forceful advocacy of nationalist claims; but this did not mean that the coalition departed from the broad vision established by Australia to deal with the postwar world. As Margaret George puts it in terms of evaluating the Australian government's approach overall to the Indonesian independence issue, "although the Australian government officially prized itself as the articulator and protector of the Republic, its support was qualified and its diplomatic record not one of dependability or effectiveness. It did not always respond to the Republic's requests for support or assistance, nor did it always give the Republic the kind of support that it most needed, or at the times when needed." This was not least due to inconsistency and lack of coordination among government agencies and officials, compounded by Evatt's lack of coordination with

[38] Ibid.

Cabinet or his Prime Minister.[39] Australian governments from 1950 emphasized the importance of engaging with Asia through the key initiative of the Colombo Plan (sometimes dubbed the Spender plan due to the initiatives by Percy Spender in the efforts). Through the plan, "Australian technicians went into many parts of Southeast Asia on aid projects". Engaging Asian nations, Australia became a principal sponsor of the Plan and this led to an increase in trade, engagement between communities in South and South East Asia and Australians, and increased tourism by Australians to the Southeast Asian region.[40]

The growing consensus between Defence and External affairs, despite their differences, on a shift in emphasis of Australia's priorities to the Southeast Asian region from the Middle East, was marked also by a shift in the nature of the threat into the Asian continent. While earlier conflicts in Malaya gave an impetus to Australian involvement via its obligations, the rise of a new People's Republic of China, the advent of the Korean War, and the growth of the communist threat in mainland and insular Southeast Asia meant that contingency and events directed the change in the nature of Australian focus. This did not necessarily mean an abandonment of aims developed prior to 1949, but a new government focused on combating communism at home and abroad had to contend with the pace of events that would come to dictate the direction of forward defence.

[39] George, Margaret. *Australia and the Indonesian Revolution*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press 1980, pp.166-167.
[40] Millar, T.B. *Australia in Peace and War*. Sydney: Australian National University Press, 1991, pp.130-131.

As the Cold War came to spread ideological, and actual, conflicts into Southeast Asia, it became intertwined with the processes of decolonization, and the nationalist aspirations surrounding this. On 7 April 1954 Minister for External Affairs Richard Casey spoke in Parliament, giving his first major statement on the crisis in Indochina. That same day, the Australian High Commission in London cabled Canberra telling of British advice of a dilemma that would come to bear upon the actors in our narrative: the provision of American military aid should be encouraged but any more "dangerous form of United States involvement" was not. Casey had to balance the line in accordance with this for Australia. He told parliament that Indochina was to be "important for the security of the whole free world". If it fell, Malaya might fall to the communists.[41]

Labor, in opposition, echoed prior concerns over just how force would be used and under what aegis, but this did not substantially alter the Australian conviction or plans to involve itself actively in the situation. Evatt stood in response, making a plea for UN intervention into the situation, because Casey pointed to difficulties in referring the matter to the UN. Evatt, though, agreed with Casey, that if Indochina became communist it would be "the end of self government for the people,"[42] but wished for the states to be brought into a commonwealth arrangement with France. Ambassador to the US Percy Spender, around the time of

[41] Edwards, *Crises*, p.127.
[42] Ibid.

this speech, highlighted the importance of timeliness — even as Casey suggested the monsoon might bring a respite to the situation.

The same day, give or take time difference, Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke of dominoes falling, and pre-empting as a form of action in Indochina. How to deal with this would play out in ways of fundamental importance to the defence of Australia, because it would pave the road to contributing to means, multilateral or otherwise, to advance the end of forward defence. Australian efforts to engage in the international community had already made its presence clear in collectives such as ANZUS and ANZAM. SEATO provided the opportunity to draw in the support of its powerful friends while managing Asian relations, though its formation was far from a forgone conclusion. The Australians would play an active role in developing the organization from its inception. But this meant it needed to tie together obligations with means, managing in the best possible way a commitment to defending itself by using resources to deter conflict in what would come to be termed the treaty area.

Leicester C. Webb describes Australia's role in the conclusion of the South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty (SEACDT) as "the first attempt by an Australian government to play a major and independent part in international politics … they [also] illustrate the possibilities and limitations created for her diplomacy by her position as a secondary European power adjacent to South-East Asia."[43] This is a valid assessment, but while he terms Australia's role both mediatory and

[43] Modelski, George (ed.), *SEATO: Six Studies*. Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1962, pp.67-69.

awkward, Australia, while balancing commitments and creating new responsibilities, was active and not merely reactive. This is not to say that Australia took on a leadership role or that it did not need to rely on its commitments to its two major allies, but to demonstrate the energy with which politicians and planners transformed a collective defence network in Southeast Asia from vision to reality. Australia's commitments prior to SEATO were important, but they did not cover the scope of the region as comprehensively. ANZUS addressed the Southwest Pacific, and ANZAM addressed Malaya, but SEATO matched the regional aspirations of a continental NATO, in its own way. This distinction is important, and has been convincingly addressed by Fenton in regards to the negative review SEATO has received compared to its European counterpart. That NATO was not activated until after the Cold War and SEATO disbanded during the global conflict is not reason enough to dismiss SEATO's work.[44] SEATO had a unique place in Australian foreign policy after the Second World War, tying together military imperatives with the desire to project a vision of benevolence through aid schemes such as the Colombo Plan. It gave expression to a sense of legitimate deterrence, and contributed to a growing appreciation of limits to the conduct to war and expansion of the understanding of deterrence. The key element here, that would come to bear on Australian planners, is subversion from either within or without.

Australian grand strategy, in the form of forward defence, came to play a substantive but subtle role in the expression of its engagement

[44] See Fenton, *To Cage*, p.2.

with agreements from Geneva onwards. The treaty negotiations that led to the formation of a South East Asia Treaty Organization were ushered in by the process of dialogue and discussion among the principal actors in Manila, in the latter half of 1954. Following the Geneva conference, in September 1954, Australian diplomats and ministers tried to engage seriously the processes that would establish the organization. In a note written for the purpose of consultation by the Acting Minister for External Affairs, the "action" article of the organization introduced the nature and scope of the security commitment, and the idea of collective security in a consultative framework in the event of the threat of aggression in the treaty area.[45]

But the action article was not the same as the massive retaliation enshrined in its Atlantic counterpart. The same note, under the heading "Advantages in SEATO Treaty,"[46] discussed how it would benefit Australia to secure a definite American commitment against communist aggression in Southeast Asia. It also appraised communist subversion as the main threat to Australian security in the Associated States (Cambodia, Laos, South Vietnam), Thailand and Malaya. While the first priority would be to secure American participation, the guarantee of the Asian signatories would be a safeguard against communist subversion.

A general appreciation in the note was that the treaty was favourable to Australian strategic imperatives. Three areas identified as central or relevant to the Australian vision were that it accorded with the

[45] NAA: A1838, TS 688/6/2/2. Indo-China Settlement Program of Action. Richard Casey to Cabinet, 22 July 1954.
[46] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Paper Submitted to External Affairs Minister, 23 September, 1954.

charter of the UN; that it was defensive and not aggressive; and that it did not offend the Asians. Also, the economic clause was identified as "permissive" in nature and did not involve formal commitments. Here it was clear that the organization could serve as a legitimate structure to defend Southeast Asia without requiring Australia to present itself in a position of belligerence.[47]

For Australia, the military planning machinery was of utmost importance, which meant SEATO gave expression not just to direct military intervention and response, but also to deterrence to counter threats of a more complex nature.[48] It also formalized the growing coordination between Defence and External Affairs towards a more regional focus, subsequent to the change in the nature of defence commitments in the Middle East. While planners saw that it might be useful to have a specific military commitment for treaty signatories to coordinate their military planning, this was unacceptable to the US. Casey, about to leave for the conference, put it clearly that, to involve the big powers in planning to defend the Southeast Asian area, "we in Australia realize very well that you can't get something from nothing".[49] US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles made it clear that he was willing to discuss such plans with the UK, Australia, and New Zealand but not with the others, which excluded the Asian players but, more significantly, France.

[47] NAA: A1838, TS 688/6/2/2. Membership of South East Asia Defence Organization, 19 July 1954.
[48] NAA: A1838, TS 688/6/2/2. Australian Objectives in SEATO, 18 August 1954.
[49] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Manila Conference, Statement by the Minister for External Affairs, 2 September 1954.

Any such commitment could jeopardize the standing of nations if it did not work out, or if enemies could exploit such negotiations to further their own Cold War aims, broadly speaking. The US was concerned with secrecy before discussing such a force commitment. While the documents indicate that Australian delegates had secured a specific reference to military planning in Article 5 of the treaty, they noted with caution that it was unclear about the scope of such planning. They found that "we now have to work out with the Americans and the United Kingdom and New Zealand how these four powers can concert their planning."[50] Similarly, the issue of aggression and its definition preoccupied the signatories, not least because the US had signed a special reservation stating that it would accept the point of aggression only if it was communist in nature, and in contrast, the UK, Pakistan and possibly France would not have signed with the word included.[51]

Australia was thus caught between a rock and a hard place. Australian planners indicated that more time should have been set aside during negotiations to discuss the inclusion of the term communist. Dulles was clear that Senate approval would be difficult to obtain if the threat or the response to such a threat was pursued in circumstances that did not endanger US security. Richard Casey saw that Australia would have to follow a policy that did not risk forfeiting US confidence in Canberra. While considering whether or not to pursue a similar reservation to the US,

[50] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Note to Prime Minister from External Affairs, 7 September 1954.
[51] See documents concerning proposed reservations in NAA: A1209, 1957/4257.

Australian representatives evaluated areas where they might face non-communist aggression, within the treaty area.[52]

Four likely sources of non-communist aggression-linked conflict were identified — fighting between India and Pakistan, between Burma and Thailand, and aggression by Indonesia or Japan. The threats can be evaluated as follows: the first was most likely but Casey told Pakistan Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan that the Australians did not see the treaty coming into effect in the Indian subcontinent; hostilities between Burma and Thailand were not likely for the moment, and if border issues surfaced, they would not likely constitute SEATO understanding of aggression; in the case of possible aggression by non-communist Indonesia in Dutch New Guinea no automatic action would be undertaken under Article 4 (1) in the treaty as the Netherlands was not a party to SEATO. In a hand-written note, it was added to the document that "ANZUS applies to non-communist aggression by Indonesia against Australia", but it was also stated that Indonesian aggression against other territories in the area would be covered under Article 4 (1). Finally, on Japan, the provisions of ANZUS would cover any such threat.[53]

Australia needed to find a balance between conflicts where it was willing to intervene and those where it could not sensibly do so. Policymakers were careful to note that Pakistan should be informed, in writing, in the event of conflict between it and India that Australia was not

[52] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. American Attitude to a Reservation by Australia, 21 September 1954.
[53] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Paper Submitted to External Affairs Minister, 23 September, 1954.

bound under SEATO to intervene.[54] While the US had a provision under the treaty to act only in the event of specific threats that could be constituted as communist aggression, it was considering drafting a treaty text as strong as the NATO guarantee for Europe. When Dulles was asked in a press conference about a warning by Menzies to the Australian people about possible military support to defend both the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia more broadly, through SEATO as an instrument, his reply was cautious, indicating that he could not commit to a response before the Manila conference. When asked about the possible "economic and subversion angles," Dulles responded that such penetration should be discussed among the powers — but need not be pursued by SEATO itself, because of prior agreements between states. Referring to similar earlier treaties like the Colombo Plan, Dulles said there could be either a single treaty with two parts, or two treaties with different membership, or informal arrangements with an economic character. Thus, a number of permutations were identified ahead of the Manila meeting.[55]

The UK, ever cautious and wishing to manage decolonization while maintaining relationships with nationalist leaders, was interested in deterring communism but also making SEATO look politically legitimate by incorporating Asian opinion. Where doubts arose among Asian nationalist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, the UK establishment tried to allay them, even in the face of the prospect of a defensive organization.

[54] Casey was reported to have told the Pakistani representative this information orally, thus making the further notification necessary in black and white.
[55] NAA: A1838, 250/8/20 Part 1. Daily Wireless Bulletin No. 32, News Attachment by Dept. of External Affairs, 27 August 1954.

In a letter to Nehru on 25 September 1954, Anthony Eden was quick to suggest that Nehru should not give rise to apprehensions and misunderstanding of the nature and scope of the SEATO treaty. The divergence in approach between the former colony and colonizer was "a difference not of objectives but of methods".[56]

While noting the "already evident" prospect of China's good faith in the face of the Geneva settlement, Eden wrote that experience had shown that such assurances by communist powers could not be trusted without additional safeguards. Apprehensions were noted in the face of Mao Zedong's statement that as the result of a two-camp global order in the Cold War "neutrality is no more than a word with which to delude people." Such statements were backed up by hard facts on the ground, especially in the case of China's behaviour in Korea and Laos. This also meant managing the idea of incorporating the Associated States into the organization, technically before elections in key areas such as South Vietnam, scheduled for 1956, though the UK wanted to make it clear that collective security was not an attempt to meddle in the affairs of these states.

While Eden, in the spirit of caution characteristic of postwar British planning, indicated a desire to avoid policy miscalculation that might lead to war, he made it clear that the need to defend the ideals the UK, and others, stood for through force could not be disregarded. The UK's role in global affairs had to mitigate priorities in Europe, and at home, the Middle

[56] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Text of Personal Message from Mr. Eden to Mr. Nehru, [received] 30 September 1954.

East and Asia. The UK was by no means yet a postcolonial power, and was in the process of preparing colonies for independence, which was in David Goldsworthy's view, a piecemeal process.[57]

Australia, while wanting to encourage a more substantive military organization and emphasize "teeth," also placed importance on keeping these plans secret, not only against possible infiltration by the enemy, but also to deter internal failings as well. This was reflected, not least, in concerns among broadly Western powers over the reliability of the Asian parties. Australian planners were concerned that the Philippines would act, based on a quoted report in the *Sydney Morning Herald,* in a way that might deter Dulles from attending the Manila conference. This was because the Philippines was expected to surprise the conference by asking for more "teeth" in the SEATO organization. Australia should not be seen to support this position, as it was important to establish a tactful approach that was more inclusive, while talk of military strength might compromise such a position.[58]

The Australians appreciated the American security guarantee, and wished to impress upon the US the need to commit effective resources to defend Australia. When Australian representatives met the US ambassador, they met a solid "no" to the idea of a treaty that resembled NATO,[59] as US commitment to ground forces would not likely draw public support. Bringing the matter of Southeast Asia, and particularly the

[57] Goldsworthy, David, *Losing the Blanket: Australia and the End of Britain's Empire*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2002.
[58] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Briefing for Prime Minister- Prime Minister's Department, 1 September 1954.
[59] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Australian Delegation to S.E.A.T.O. Conference to External Affairs, 31 August 1954.

defence of Malaya and Thailand, to the table, US Ambassador to the Philippines Raymond Spruance was consulted. Australian representatives made it clear: the link between a SEATO with teeth and force contributions to be consulted and consolidated would revolve around a strategic area stemming from the Kra Isthmus in Thailand.[60]

Similarly, it was reported that the US rejected Eden's suggestion to redraft Article 4 of the treaty to make it resemble the NATO text more closely. Alan Watt reported the worrisome news that the US might imagine the SEATO treaty to be not much more than political in nature. Watt would, in the making of the treaty text, suggest that Spender pressure Dulles before the latter proceeded to Manila. Four areas were suggested:

> — Urgent need to build confidence among non-communists in the area;
>
> — Serious effect if the Manila Treaty was so general and vague as to be open to communist claims that it was worthless;
>
> — Defensibility of Malaya. Did the Americans realize that their present attitude might imply they had written off Malaya? Should London accept this implication without question? Might not the Australian attitude towards the defence of Malaya be substantially affected by this attitude?

[60] Ibid.

— Efforts to ensure that Dulles and Eden kept an open mind [matter unclear in document] and not reach a final decision on major issues pending discussions in Manila at foreign minister level.[61]

The Australians needed to get their legalities in order, as did most other parties privy to the processes that formalized the Manila Treaty. The Australians carefully monitored and tried to decipher the American reservation in the treaty text, making sure that they were always abreast of developments.[62] Australian planners knew they had to be in the game and at the table. They could not sit back and let developments overtake them. Timing provided a link between great power motivations, intentions and actions, but also opportunities for Australia to make an impact. Australian analysts found that American administration policy was still based on collective security, while the Republicans in the US preferred greater selectivity over allies and less regard for universal solutions. Dulles faced a crumbling of "united action" against communist expansion. The grave situation in Asia was expressed thus: "Vietnam may be lost in two years. Japan is sick. Communist China has come out of Geneva with an enhanced diplomatic status which evidently cannot be long denied. Britain wants conciliation, and is suspected." The US had modified its position, at least in terms of Dulles' "united action" concept, to appear as

[61] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Alan Watt (Australian Delegation Manila) to Minister and Secretary of External Affairs, 31 August 1954.

[62] ANZUS documents attest to this point too. There is a general sense that if Australian planners were not aware and could react significantly to developments initiated by the US, it might compromise their positions. See Holdich, Roger, Johnson, Vivian, & Andre, Pamela. *The ANZUS Treaty 1951*. Canberra: Dept. of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2001.

a form of unity to be communicated to Congress, in order to cut through the frustration of a collective approach and instead draw attention towards a long-range strategic air force, and the atomic bomb. Only a few months before the change of political constellations in Vietnam, it was reiterated that no American would support the use of force in Southeast Asia. The Australians expressed the issue as "we, and S.E. Asia, are still remote". Secretary to the Department of External Affairs Arthur Tange was to conclude that an Australian ratification of SEATO without reservation was the best way forward.[63]

Australia's careful attention to US motivations did not lessen its obligations to the UK. The UK High Commissioner in Canberra wrote to the Department of External Affairs, reacting to reports by two Australian newspapers that Eden's non-attendance at the Manila conference was evidence that Britain had "written off" Australia. The reports claimed that SEATO was "playing a poor second fiddle in Britain….the average Briton seems to know next to nothing about SEATO…and he seems to care even less about what SEATO means to Australia". The High Commissioner called this "ill conditioned nonsense".[64]

Australian force contributions required careful planning under SEATO provisions, but this applied to all parties privy to the treaty. The other side of this was to consider economic aid to the region, especially in the case of threats to legitimacy. But aid itself was subject to a test of just what it meant to be legitimate. As for military planning under Article

[63] See NAA: A1838: TS688/6/2/2, for relevant documents.
[64] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Note from UK High Commissioner to Robert Menzies, 16 September 1954.

5, SEATO consultations and planning had a direct effect on the earmarking of Australian forces.[65] Other provisions were discussed, including reluctantly accepting a Pacific charter-type arrangement while discouraging the Philippine attempt to encourage self-determination through the treaty.

During negotiations, officers from overseas posts recognized the importance of timely notifications. McKnight from Singapore cabled Canberra on 11 September 1954 to highlight how the events and decisions behind Australian ratification would be a complex process. The telegram mentioned Tange's note about tabling the text of SEATO in parliament — and that it was important to debate the text in parliament before proceeding with the treaty, and to decide whether or not to ratify the treaty including US conditions for ratification (referring to its reservation in terms of communist aggression). This would make explaining the why of entering into SEATO easier, in terms of popular consultation through democratic processes. However, the process could also buy time for Casey to gain some perspective from his talks in Rangoon and more easily ascertain Pakistan's attitude.[66]

Further, there was urgency for technical and other reasons — two members were not well, and could not secure flight arrangements to deliver the message in Canberra faster. Another technical challenge in relaying information from the conference to Canberra was due to two

[65] NAA: A1838: TS688/6/2/2. Minute by Defence Committee at Meeting Held on 29th July 1954: Proposed Establishment of SEATO- Report on Defence Aspects, 29 July 1954.
[66] NAA: 1209, 1957/4257. Letter from Alan Watt to Arthur Tange, 9 September 1954.

related complications — the pace of events that burdened the compilation of information, and the efforts of a single official, Kaye, to relay messages.[67] The implication of this is that a policy establishment could not conform to the seemingly mechanical and impersonal appearance it is often assumed to embody. Often, the actions of a single official, or lack thereof, could have serious consequences on the decision-making process at the highest levels.

From bed, recovering from a heavy cold, Alan Watt, Tange's predecessor at the Department of External Affairs, wrote to Tange that "we must never again allow the Americans to place us in the position of having to accept a terminal date to a conference before it meets".[68] This was not the first time that Australian diplomats would indicate a desire not to be left behind, especially in matters concerning the influence they exerted on the US. Watt suggested that Canberra sent mixed signals on the topic of aggression in the treaty text. On the one hand, it was useful to delete the term "communist"; on the other, some signals suggested Australian reservation in line with the American position of action only in the event of communist aggression. Cabinet was unclear how terms such as "act" in Article 4 (1) of the treaty would be understood from the perspective of committing Australian forces.[69] Casey won the respect of his fellow diplomats by acting and rejecting the "safe" approach — but

[67] Watt demonstrated a liking for Mr. Kaye's abilities who "never lost his zest or balance under the heaviest physical, and to some extent, psychological, pressure". Watt was not so kind to all the members of his delegation —Mr. Moore was described as "useless" (Mrs. Moore was seen as difficult as well).
[68] NAA: 1209, 1957/4257. Letter from Alan Watt to Arthur Tange, 9 September 1954.
[69] Ibid.

this left him unclear on whether or not to make a reservation when the US and the UK were so clearly opposed. Language in the text of the treaty would capture the divergence of intentions, positions and outcomes of the powers who eventually signed the treaty.

Australia knew it had to leverage on the US guarantee, while advancing its own interests. Watt put it well — indecision by the parties privy to the conference may have resulted in "the Conference a fiasco, Communist propaganda given a perfect field and SEATO perhaps damned at birth". The New Zealand Minister for External Affairs, Clifton Webb, praised Casey for getting a specific reference to military planning in the treaty under Article 5.[70] However, the New Zealand officials complained to the Australians over US comments on a possible "vacillation" in their position and commitment. While the US made some commitments to planning which involved the UK, Australia and New Zealand, it was unclear how or when such planning would take place.

While Australia did not eventually sign the treaty with reservation, it made clear the pressing threat of communist aggression that would menace freedom in Southeast Asia. Similarly, due consideration was given to any commitments that might result in Australian involvement in Southeast Asia in internal disputes that did not concern communist aggression or American participation. Cabinet decided that Australia should sign the treaty with a similar reservation to the US, but a major caveat to this decision was the arguments of both the US and the UK

[70] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Record of Conversation with New Zealand Delegation to Preliminary SEATO Talks in Manila, 29 August 1954.

against such a course by Australia. Australia did not eventually sign the treaty with formal reservation, but thought "it necessary to say that we regard it as the real purpose of the treaty to present a concerted front against aggressive Communism, which presents the free world with its immediate problem of security". Signing the treaty with or without a reservation may have hinged on the attitude of bigger powers, but this does not imply that Australia's actions were an act of obligation to them.[71]

Reservations were a bugbear that troubled relations between parties to the SEATO treaty. Dulles, in a personal letter to Menzies before leaving Manila, noted how serious persuasion after "the greatest difficulty" made the Philippines withdraw its decision to sign with a reservation and hoped Menzies would decide against such an Australian reservation.[72] The case was made that the US, because it was not part of the geographical area, could act against aggression only if it was of a communist nature, as other forms of aggression need not threaten US national security. The UK would continue to make overtures to the Indian and Ceylonese governments that, because the treaty was not offensive but defensive in nature, it did not interfere with the promotion of self-government and economic advancement of Asian states.

It was proposed that SEATO be open to more members, should the current signatories agree, in a clear reference to the established UK policy

[71] See NAA: A1209, 1957/4257; NAA: A1838: TS688/6/2/2. Date range of documents on subject from August to Early September 1954.
[72] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. Paper Submitted to Acting Minister of External Affairs from M.R. Booker, 21 September 1954.

of trying to incorporate Asian polities into the organization, and sealing its legitimacy.

Australia needed to manage the shift towards new partners in defence without abandoning ties of kinship and commonwealth with its traditional allies. Casey contemplated including the UK in ANZUS planning as a way to navigate between the divergent positions of the US and the UK at the conference, but a position paper sums the point nicely as to how Australia attempted to wade through the difficult waters of the incongruous positions: "we have to steer between the U.K. and the U.S. Ultimately, to achieve what we want in SEATO, we have to be with the U.S.- but not against U.K."[73]

The Protocol States, alongside and corresponding to the legal justifications to draft them into the treaty without formal participation by the members, were further reflected and in some sense reassured as part of the geographical area of the treaty's concern but might not be defended without their consent. UK planners tried to reflect that apart from the Indochina states, similar designations without request were out of the question. These reflected their attempt to balance their growing need to persuade their former colonies and similar Asian states or polities that they were acting in their interests. All this was not a display of rhetorical skill. The significance of and success of the Geneva Conference hinged on Eden's and more broadly British efforts to manage the precarious sovereignty affecting the future of the two Vietnams.

[73] NAA: A1838: TS688/6/2/2. Notes taken in Cabinet Room, addressed to "Mr. Tange", 29 August 1954.

Australian diplomat James Plimsoll reflected in his discussions with the French that the interests of Australia lay in engaging with the area covered by SEATO but to designate it adequately to meet the threat. Similarly, the French were interested in how the existing Five Power Staff agency might play a role in SEATO. This was met with ambiguity, like many other statements concerning the shape and nature of the organization in late 1954: they gave an idea that the formal structure of SEATO was not set in stone.[74] Basic operating principles need not translate into a systematic and sustained effort to create a machinery for the organization, but this was not yet the most important task at hand. The matter of the Associated States was, clearly, pertinent to all parties planning their defence. The Americans communicated to the British that the draft treaty should not be shown to the Associated States at that moment.

Similarly, it would not be politically advantageous to have to consult the French, especially because of their position in the post-colonial situation. This unease with the French in the new political atmosphere was extended to aid: the US wanted to channel aid into Vietnam but it was seen as more expedient to give direct aid rather than channel it through the French. This did not please the French, who said if the aid was given this might "excite the Chinese" and undermine the legitimacy of the Geneva agreements.

[74] NAA: A1838: TS688/6/2/2. Similarly, defining the Treaty Area when it came to the Protocol States was ill defined for ambiguity "Imprecise definition is preferable". SEATO- Addressed to Various Australian Embassies, 26 August 1954.

The Australian Defence Committee, reviewing the treaty obligations and the reports of the UK proposals in document COS (54) 259,[75] suggested that the area to be covered by the treaty was a political question, but effective military planning could occur only if the general treaty area was adopted. It suggested that it would contribute forces to the strategic reserve — one bomber squadron, two fighter squadrons (subject to shift in No. 77 squadron from Korea and redeployment of personnel of No. 78 wing from Manila) and one airfield construction squadron. Also, it was noted that the squadrons in the Middle East could be used in Malaya during peacetime, or deployed as "an Australian contribution to collective action in Southeast Asia".

Shifting from official negotiations to the domestic arena, it is imperative to consider public opinion in terms of the legitimacy of the organization at home, in Australia, with regard to SEATO. In a poll conducted in early September 1954, both the Sydney *Sun* and Adelaide *Advertiser* broadsheets suggested that there was overwhelming support for the organization, one headline proclaiming that it should be supported "with force". This can perhaps relate to attitudes of the general security climate of the time, especially in the article in the *Sun*, which reflected that an Australian volunteer force could "help stop communist over-running of South-East Asia".[76] The domestic scene at this point was one

[75] NAA: A1209, 1957/4257. South East Asia Collective Security Organization- Defence Aspects: Supplementary Observations by Defence Committee, 26 August 1954.

[76] *Sun* (Sydney, NSW : 1910 - 1954), Thursday 9 September 1954, page 21; *Advertiser* (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Wednesday 8 September 1954, page 5.

that did not hinder but instead supported increased but qualified involvement in organizations such as SEATO. A fractured Labor party, the scares of domestic subversion in the form of communist persons and organizations operating within Australian shores, and the continued championing by the government of the organization as legitimate contributed to an atmosphere positive to SEATO but cautious in terms of exact military contributions and the directed but not improper use of force.

From the negotiations of the treaty and the discussions that were undertaken relating to its clauses, and the settlement and signature of the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty in September 1954 onwards, a few themes stand out in terms of the Australian approach. These directly revolve around the two organizing points of timing and overlaps. They can be summarised in three brief, but encompassing points. Aggression for Australian planners became largely a matter of Communist aggression, and there was a growing emphasis on the priority of the Protocol States as first priority territories. Second, SEATO reinforced previous structures and Australian commitments to them, but by no means negated them. This is especially important with regards to the Far East Strategic Reserve, and the contributions thereto. Third, problems of consensus emerged from divergences in approach, but did not hinder the overall delineation of a treaty area and the general consensus that capabilities would be directed to this area. SEATO became a structure that

needed to build capabilities in the economic sphere, the military deterrent, and the ability to identify and counter subversion. SEATO in this period became more than the sum of complex negotiations, although the numerous drafts to the treaty would suggest a deep sense of caution in finding ways to give expression to the impetus of defending a regional zone. The signatories of the Pact came to realize the old dictum that commitments needed to be honoured, but the ways in which they put forward resources and interest into the commitments would play out in important ways to the development of a legitimate organization.

Conclusion

Australian planners played an active role in the post-war world, using numerous platforms to balance great power relationships alongside new partnerships that focused on positive and constructive engagements with the Southeast Asian region, among other Commonwealth obligations. This did not always materialise in the form of military pacts, but certainly through SEATO took shape in such a manner. Australian planners tried to keep themselves abreast of developments so to have the ability to influence them. In the case of SEATO, indeed both were the case. But this did not negate the broader underlying reality that differences in understanding among principal members of the organization, the US and the UK over the approach to aggression- played out tellingly through the American reservation to the treaty- made the organization fall short of a NATO-style guarantee. What Australia brought to the table was the ability

to play a role pushing for greater legitimacy in terms of military effectiveness and also political constructiveness in embracing Asian opinion in the organization. These were not ends in themselves.

Australian politicians and policymakers needed to contend with the forces of the Cold War, pushed along by numerous conflicts in the region to their north geographically. This meant that forward defence necessitated the means used to achieve the influence they exerted in SEATO. The organization can be seen as a potential, but not complete bridge, between obligations under ANZAM and ANZUS, solidifying a guarantee to the defence of Southeast Asia through a Western platform. The conventional threats to the region were pronounced, especially in a post-Korean War world, and with the seemingly ubiquitous armed forces of the People's Volunteers in China, becoming a professionalised force. Southeast Asia became a centrepiece in the broader strategic arena where territories were not just subject to the possibility of such conventional invasion, but also subversive infiltration. Australian planners knew that an organization such as SEATO could be the deterrent against such motivations. But they could only do so much to legitimize its structures in its incipient stages.

Chapter 2: Building Legitimacy: Australia and the Development of SEATO

"Because we have won two world wars by outproducing our opponent, we have tended to equate military superiority with superiority in resources and technology. Yet history demonstrates that superiority in strategic doctrine has been the source of victory at least as often as superiority in resources … superior mobility and superior use of artillery, a better relationship between fire and movement, provided the basis of Napoleon's victories … all these were victories not of resources but of strategic doctrine: the ability to break the framework and to make the victory all the more complete by confronting the enemy with contingencies he never even considered. Thus a key to a proper doctrine is the correct understanding of one's own superiority, and the ability to apply them more rapidly than the opponent…" — Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*[77]

The growing institutionalization of SEATO between 1955 and 1959 was paralleled by Australian planners who wanted a say in what the organization would become, notwithstanding Australian material limitations. The development of plans, and infrastructure to create and manage these plans, with other activities, complemented but did not always correspond to Australian officials' objectives. Formalizing SEATO into an organization with a structure of supporting offices and committees involved legitimacy. Legitimizing the structure meant that the organization established concepts, standards, plans and overarching principles that could meet the dangers of primarily communist aggression

[77] Kissinger, Henry. *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. New York: Harper, 1957. pp.21-22.

and related threats in what was termed the “Treaty Area”. The years that marked the formalization of the structures of SEATO depended on more than Australian planners’ objectives and their pursuit of aligning national goals to regional and broader defence objectives through the multilateral platform that was SEATO.

Consensus was needed to provide both military and political legitimacy. This was important in the former case to provide a capable deterrent. In the latter, it gave the organization a basis to work positively to develop the Southeast Asian region and communicate a constructive agenda to the region and other powers. However, consensus meant relating diverse SEATO member interests and intentions to tangible outcomes. This had some success, in that structures and plans were developed on an organizational basis. But consensus was not a guarantee of an orchestrated commitment to action in the event of threats to the Treaty Area.

Australia, concomitantly, sought to legitimize its own role and buttress and promote its own grand strategy of forward defence in SEATO. But this did not only take the form of military planning, nor did military planning refer only to conventional ground forces. Australian planners faced the problem of the pronounced and growing threat of subversion in Southeast Asia, but also had to face an Eisenhower administration that emphasized “New Look” as a grand strategy which reappraised and modified Containment but did not reject it. What this meant for Australian planners, and SEATO more broadly, was to consider threats and the use

of force to meet these threats in a way which considered not only conventional scenarios, but also countersubversion and nuclear war.

Deterrence was a key goal of Australian and SEATO planners in this period, and both considered how it could effectively meet the threat in various scenarios. In historiographical terms, this chapter should demonstrate that in these years, broadly speaking 1955 to 1959, SEATO plans to meet threats and create opportunities for development are evidence that the organization was not a mere paper tiger from its inception. Instead, it aimed to be a legitimate deterrent.

As a middle power, Australia had limitations that required it to depend on the preponderant power of its great friends. But Australia used its position not just to influence and be included in a smaller club of nations within SEATO, but more broadly tried to promote its own work and the work of the organization as both effective and constructive, which meant defending the goals of the organization as legitimate, and translating promises into concrete plans. This was critical to ensure the investment of power by the UK and the US in the region, but in a sense this investment would directly contribute to forward defence. But dependence did not mean reliance, nor did the US and the UK make the organization the sum of its parts. To keep the work of SEATO timely and relevant, planners needed to engage with all powers in the organization, and apply the best plans to different scenarios. Changing circumstances required not just consensus or preponderant power, but an actual coordination and demonstration of an effective deterrent. Planners

understood they could not fix forces to situations in which the threat itself was variable and conditional on the broader situation of Cold War politics, regional aspirations towards nationalism,[78] and subversion. For Australia, these issues were not imagined scenarios. Not being prepared enough could mean the fall of Southeast Asia to global communism, and a direct threat to the Australian homeland.

It must be said that the Australian policymaking establishment, while evolving in this period to meet greater bureaucratic requirements and address regional and broader global challenges during the Cold War, did not change much in substance, especially in these years. This should not imply, however, a preponderance of consensus at home, while the Menzies government did secure a continuing pre-eminence politically. As Christopher Waters notes in the case of Richard Casey in the Department of External Affairs, Casey worked better with Arthur Tange than with his predecessor, Alan Watt. What began as a positive relationship between Casey and Tange, who was "direct and decisive … he bestrode his talented but small and struggling Department like a colossus", began to find fault lines in the latter half of the 1950s after "Casey's ineffectiveness in Cabinet and his penchant for covert activities, rather than diplomacy, became a major source of frustration for Tange."[79] This, and a concomitant problem of Casey's apparent lack of innovativeness as a

[78] The oxymoron here is as apt as that of 'invented traditions'.
[79] Waters, Christopher, "Cold War Liberals: Richard Casey and the Department of External Affairs, 1951-60", in Beaumont (et al.), *Ministers*, p. 95.

minister, did not stop him or the government who "emphasized the role of SEATO at every possible opportunity."[80]

A similar dynamic can be seen in a more serious policy in the later 1950s on West New Guinea. While the previous administration had supported Indonesian independence, Australia had not championed all transfers of sovereignty under such an arrangement. This led to its support of Dutch claims over New Guinea, and Cold War uncertainties over the internal situation in Indonesia led Casey to say in Cabinet that "it is desirable in the interests of Australia's own defence that West New Guinea should be in the hands of a non-Communist government. Indonesia is non-Communist but … we cannot be sure that it will not in the course of time come into the communist orbit". Similarly, in 1957, by aligning itself with the Dutch claims "Australia angered not only Indonesia but a growing number of newly independent Asian and African states." This implies that Australia, while maintaining a broad support for nationalist claims, was also subject to the Menzies government's earlier suspicions about Indonesian intentions, and relations were strained by Indonesian claims over sovereignty as well as the broader Cold War context.[81] Thus, as before, Australian interests to forward its own grand strategy took priority over championing of regional aspirations, but the two were related.

Staff Planners, the MPO and Legitimate Military Deterrence

[80] Edwards, Peter. *Crises*, p. 184.
[81] Ibid., pp.201-203.

From 1955 onwards, it became clear that SEATO forces needed to be deployed in scenarios that would jeopardize the status of, especially but not limited to, South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, where SEATO guarantees to the Protocol States also meant having adequate forces on the ground. In Pearl Harbor in 1955, staff planners decided the minimum holding position would be Saigon. They also regarded 90 days as the time in which SEATO forces should engage the potential threat, thus meeting deployment requirements. It is important to note that while planners understood the defence of the Protocol States, this did not exhaust their focus areas and thus plans were developed to other places affected by potential or actual communist threats, especially Thailand and Pakistan. While overt threats were the most prominent focus in 1955, this did not exclude subversion.[82]

In the event of direct Chinese aggression in the Treaty Area, staff planners in 1955 considered using atomic munitions. This produced the first SEATO paper that envisaged the use of such munitions, and divided them into three categories of bombs. The first were those capable of major destruction (a city), the second medium destruction (an airfield, or aircraft and major facilities in it), the third limited, which could destroy troop concentrations. Timing was important to ensure the appropriate response, which meant that priority of attack had to be based on class of targets. Twenty-five first priority targets were identified for atomic attack in North Vietnam and China. Another 75 would be suitable for non-atomic

[82] NAA: A1209, 1957/ 5853. Provision of Military Support for the Defense of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the Event of Overt Communist Aggression. 16 November 1955.

attack. But atomic weapons did not preclude putting boots on the ground. Indigenous forces were to be encouraged to play a role in deterring potential aggression. Terrain was an issue, especially in Indochina, where mobility was required to support infantry in the form of amphibious units, parachute units and the like.[83] Similar assessments were made about the ability of the enemy to conceive and develop a nuclear approach of its own. As Fenton notes:

> While the PRC's efforts to create its own nuclear weapons were noted, it was felt that it would be many years before this programme would succeed in its aims. Furthermore, there was a surprisingly resolute confidence that whatever other military aid would be supplied from the Soviet Union to the PRC, the transfer of nuclear weapons would not be forthcoming … there was no doubt on the part of Western analysts that while Moscow [in 1956] was happy to support the build-up of a competent and capable Chinese ally in Asia, it had no wish to create a strategic rival for the leadership of the communist world.[84]

Similarly, SEATO planning did not focus in depth on nuclear war, and the link here is the US, its preponderant power in the alliance when it came to nuclear capabilities, and there was "nothing to be gained by involving their SEATO allies in planning for operations the latter would take no practical part in." Coordinating the interests of alliance use of nuclear weapons in its plans and the need to have an American partner that supplied the bulk of such capabilities, SEATO resorted to an opaque arrangement that promoted a consensus but had little value in

[83] NAA: A1209, 1957/ 5853. General Aspects of the Theatre of Operations. 16 November 1955.
[84] Fenton, *To Cage*, p.139.

substance.[85] Alas, legitimacy is often about appearances, not just definite and defined capabilities. The only other power that planned to a similar effect was the UK. Regarding the re-examination but not rejection of the US Containment policy under the New Look, with an emphasis on retaliation, we should consider these implications:

> Reduced to simplest terms, then, the new-style Containment would depend primarily on offensive retaliatory power, chiefly strategic nuclear weapons plus continental defence. All other elements of military power would play a subordinate role, particularly conventional ground forces.[86]

Australia had to contend with its own military ground contributions in Malaya during this period, where SEATO became entangled in overlaps with the defence of Malaya and the complication of national aspirations in the face of decolonization. When Menzies declared that Australian forces in Malaya would be "constantly related to SEATO defence," this both promoted Australia's faith in SEATO and indicated "implicitly doubting Britain's logistic capability in Southeast Asia in a general war."[87] Nationalism would come in the form of a Malayan lack of involvement in SEATO, but also overtures doubting the organization's good intentions among nationalist leaders. For example, in 1957 and 1958, Tunku Abdul Rahman sought to "dispel the fear that the 'Far East Commitment' would

[85] Ibid., pp.139-140.
[86] Leighton, Richard M, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Volume III*: *Strategy, Money and the New Look*. Washington D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2001. p. 189.
[87] Chin, Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore*: *the Transformation of a Security System 1957-1971*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp.30-33.

involve Malaya on the British side of an anti-colonial conflict…by dismissing Malayan involvement in any internal conflict that did not threaten Malaya". Chin Kin Wah expressed the attitudes of Malayan leaders well: "in Malayan perception, membership of SEATO was strategically unnecessary, politically unpopular, and generally ineffective."[88] This was compounded by the Tunku in 1960 "when he raised serious doubts about the efficacy of SEATO as a collective defence organization."[89] The overlap and complications were real considerations planners faced over allocating resources, how to relate defence commitments to new understandings of SEATO, and perhaps also Western defence plans for Southeast Asia in different arrangements during the latter half of the 1950s. But Australia was interested in cultivating the views of nationalist leaders in Asia to support the organization and to legitimate the presentation of the organization as effective in deterring threats that were communist in nature. These endeavors did not, in a less than propitious turn to the initial intent to incorporate more Asian powers into SEATO, result in more Asian members joining the organization. Instead, due to influential critiques by leaders such as India's Nehru, and the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1955, efforts to persuade Asian opinion were met with ambivalence at best and in the case of Malaya, a less than positive opinion in response. SEATO's official machinery made efforts to demonstrate the good that the organization was doing in the countries of Southeast Asia, but the efforts seem to

[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

present a picture of being overwhelmingly concentrated within SEATO Asian member parties, as is reflected in the *SEATO Report* series.

Australia was not just interested in engaging with regional defence through SEATO, but also saw the potential for the organization to plan for global war scenarios, although this was qualified by the problem of obtaining consensus and planning to meet such scenarios.[90] Overlaps in commitments and arrangements here come to the fore. In one sense, the guarantee of the US would be necessary to proceed in terms of using SEATO as an instrument to deal with global war scenarios, especially because of the force it could bring to the table. But bilateral discussions were held between Australia and the US under the platform of ANZUS. In fact, in late 1956 US Admiral Felix Stump advised that it was indeed advisable to discuss the approach at the ANZUS meeting before the SEATO meeting was held. The correspondence concerning global war between Admiral Stump and Australian representatives suggests another avenue that is important to understand the use of different platforms to advance Australian and other policy goals in this period.[91] This is the development of a closer cooperation among New Zealand, Australia, the UK and the US when it came to intelligence sharing, as well as conferring on matters of military planning. This concerned not just threats in Indochina, but also signals relating to activities of certain groups in

[90] NAA: A1838 TS 688/3. SEATO Strategic Concept — The Concept for the Defence of the SEATO Area in Global War. 1 November 1956.
[91] NAA: A1838 TS 688/3. Australian Defence Committee Report on SEATO Concept for the Defence of Southeast Asia in Global War, 8 November 1956.

Indonesia.[92] The global war focus would play out in Australian interests in assessing its ability to use particular measures to counter regional threats as well as whether or not these would precipitate global war, in 1956. In conditions short of global war, this was important in the event of the use of atomic weapons. Australian planners discussed the distinctions between atomic and thermonuclear weapons. While it was seen that atomic weapons were more likely to be used than thermonuclear, the Australian Joint Planning Committee noted the need to be clear when assessing the attitudes of powers such as the US, perhaps by discussing this at ANZUS council meetings.[93]

The growing coordination among Australia and other powers in an "inner" working group of nations also depended on military overlaps that existed due to already agreed-upon military obligations in the region. One such obligation or arrangement was the strategic reserve. While the forces necessary could be contributed in tandem with the UK and New Zealand, such a reserve, in 1956, was estimated to also contribute to the defence of the Treaty Area. Plimsoll noted that such a contribution "stress[ed] the importance of the defence of the treaty area without being definite about the relationship between the strategic reserve and SEATO."[94] This inner working group seems to correspond to the fact that Australia had mutual defence commitments already established with the US and the UK, but saw SEATO as a platform to tie the imperatives

[92] NAA: A1838, TS 688/3. ANZUS Council Meeting, 12 December 1956.
[93] NAA: A1838, TS 688/3. Strategic Concepts for the Defence of South-East Asia. Discussion by J.P.C. 14 December, 1956.
[94] Ibid.

together without nullifying the existing obligations or modifying the guarantees to a great degree. SEATO provided the opportunity to bring both great powers together, along with New Zealand to a common working platform to secure regional defence. This also bridged the gap between existing commitments to defending the Pacific and Malayan areas, to more broadly incorporate the Southeast Asian mainland area. This had a positive implication to Australian interests of maintaining a policy of Forward Defence. SEATO also did not cause an unnecessary burden to force commitments under the arrangements previously agreed to in ANZAM and ANZUS; in the case of the former, there was a clear overlap between force commitments. SEATO made possible increased defence arrangements without nullifying previous commitments. It also allowed Australian planners to use the opportunity to have more platforms to engage with big powers in their security planning.

Old problems relating to consensus, in terms of the inability to reconcile the purposes of SEATO with the aims of member states to promote their views on what these purposes should be, made themselves manifest in the military planning of the organization, and especially how that planning would be communicated to the broader public. This related directly to legitimacy, and the presentation of a capable deterrent force, that could, if called upon, defeat threats to the Treaty Area. One case which related to this and involved Australia was during staff planners' meetings in 1956, where the Philippine representatives were said to have

stated that "nothing concrete is being done by SEATO".[95] Such criticisms were not new, nor were sentiments by other parties that called into question the reliability of their Asian partners, especially when there were claimed leaks to the Philippine press about confidential SEATO correspondence and procedures. Canberra made its position clear to Manila: public criticism of that sort "gives encouragement to the Communists and other opponents of SEATO and casts doubt in mind as to the effectiveness of SEATO".[96]

An avenue to address criticisms of SEATO was to allow individuals such as General Charles Loewen of the UK to speak to the press. One article published by *The Age* entitled "SEATO as 'Shield of Freedom': Military Staff Planners meet in Singapore" reported Loewen's rebuttal of criticisms that the organization had become a threat to peace, or had no teeth. Loewen likened the role and purpose of SEATO to a shield, but qualified that the organization had to take more time to develop and entrench its practices. Similarly, General John Wilton of Australia made a broadcast via ABC Singapore. He stressed that security had to be seen as addressing not only armed aggression but also communist subversion, adding that "it is to be expected that the working out of complex military issues take a good deal of time."[97]

[95] NAA: A1437/1. See Correspondence Relating from Australian Embassy Manila to Australian Commission Singapore, 14 June 1956.
[96] Ibid.
[97] NAA: A1437/1. "SEATO as 'Shield of Freedom': Military Staff Planners meet in Singapore", *The Age*, 12 June 1956.

As organizational structures could support more complex military planning, this allowed planners to focus on exercises to meet the threat at hand more comprehensively. During the 10th Military Advisers meeting at Wellington in April 1959, an exercise to counter communist insurgency was tabled for the organization to take up the following year. But the US Military Adviser said such an exercise should not be publicised at all due to sensitivity. Similarly, at the meeting, "advisers agreed that insurgency was the most important question to be studied at the present time."[98]

Standardization

Standardization, a mark of the growth of a more professional and coordinated organization, was considered seriously, and in June 1956, staff planners in Singapore decided to allocate responsibilities to this end in military terms. In Pearl Harbor in 1955, it was established that standardization and coordination would allow tying together support for forces in proximate geographical regions — for example, forces in Thailand could be related to those in Indochina. This illustrates military planning of a broader trend in SEATO, that of the growing need for administrative coherence and formalization, to legitimize itself and prove effective as a capable deterrent.[99] In Singapore in 1956, SEATO asked the US to initiate and coordinate action for equipment standardization. This included the use of technical experts to assess and propose ways in which ammunition, tyres and spare parts, among other logistical items, could be

[98] NAA: A1838, TS688/10/4. Proceedings of the Tenth Military Advisers Conference, 15 April 1959.
[99] See relevant documents in NAA: A1209, 1957/ 5853.

brought under a system of common nomenclature. This helped to determine and designate the national origin of equipment used. While Australian planners established that all their equipment was of either UK or US origin, they did not see it as useful to conduct a similar survey on the origins of equipment under SEATO auspices.[100]

The development of strategic concepts would contribute to standardization but these did not lead directly to the creation of the Military Planning Office, a permanent structure to oversee military coordination in SEATO. Rather, the process of appointments can be seen as evolutionary — though the time frame from inception to a fully formed Military Planning Office was only two years. The appointment of a security coordinator was an important step because the security coordinator would ensure adequate standardization of classification of documents and confer and offer advice on security matters to the Military Liaison Group.[101] Moving the organization toward more sophisticated planning with a manageable logistical plan meant more administrative standardization. Hence, the creation of the Military Planning Office relieved the burden on ad-hoc arrangements that created, as Fenton shows the parties agreed, "inadequacies revealed by experience."[102]

The creation of the Military Planning Office was a necessary corrective to the ad-hoc committee system in SEATO, which was ineffective in the "attempt to produce detailed operational and logistical

[100] NAA: A5954, 1437/1. SEATO Staff Planners Third Meeting, June 1956 at Singapore. Australian Representation and report by staff planners. Agenda A Item G- Material Standardization. 2 October 1956.
[101] Fenton, *To Cage*, p. 63.
[102] Ibid. p. 64.

planning using a system where months could elapse … was a recipe for a painfully drawn out, expensive and inefficient process." In March 1956, military advisers considered the possibility of a Military Planning Office, and it was recommended that the Military Planning Office supersede the existing Military Liaison Group. Australia suggested the Philippines as the headquarters of the Military Planning Office, as it could "provide English speaking personnel more readily than Thailand." Eventually, however, both military and civilian arms of the organization were symbolically located next to each other in Bangkok.[103]

Australia's concerns with standardization included allocation of personnel, showing how policy decisions had implications on staffing and therefore allocation of resources and posting. This meant appointing secretarial assistance to aid Australian planners, to support the Australian head of Secretariat to SEATO. More clerical assistance meant the appointment of a new clerk/typist to help SEATO representatives with their work, replacing the old ad-hoc arrangement where one Sergeant Meredith would fulfil duties as a stopgap measure.[104]

Standardization also appeared in the creation of standardized materials to show coherence in producing and developing an agenda, and the image SEATO wished to present. This, too, was grounded in legitimacy. A series of reports detailing and recording developments in the organization was developed under the title *SEATO Record*. It would record meetings and exercises. For instance, in Canberra in 1957, council

[103] Ibid.
[104] NAA: A1209, 1957/5477. Minute by Defence Committee at Meeting, 14 November 1957.

meetings were reported and progress was charted in terms of three major points, accessible to the interested reader:

> — Maintenance of the defensive capacity of treaty members to deal effectively with armed aggression;
>
> — Extension of the programme to detect, appraise, expose and combat subversion directed from without;
>
> — Development of the economic resources of treaty members, particularly the Asian member states, by measures inside and outside SEATO[105]

Such publications would also feature initiatives in development, medical research and military aspects. It would also add a visual dimension to planning meetings. Figure 1 illustrates one such Military Advisers meeting in Canberra in 1957, opened by Philip McBride, Australian Minister for Defence:

Fig 1. Military Advisers Conference, Canberra, 1957[106]

[105] *SEATO*: *The Second Year*. Bangkok: Public Information Office, South-East Asia Treaty Organization, 19[--] (date listed as such on publication record), p.13.
[106] Ibid., p.15.

Political and Other Initiatives to Combat Subversion

Subversion was already a pressing issue when SEATO was formed, but the work of its Committee of Security Experts in SEATO, formed to broaden of the institutional capacity of the organization, produced detailed plans and appreciations. This often linked to "political" sphere calculations, but was not limited or did not exclude military means. However, it is important to note a growing shift toward aspects that did not include communist efforts for a land invasion or direct aggression to the Treaty Area. This would take the form of activities in the political sphere of countries that appeared more "subtle" but intimated a different communist approach to make gains in the region.[107] Planners saw that South Vietnam was to be preserved as anti-communist. But the rest of the Treaty Area was also important, not least due to nationalist claims and the aspirations of independent governments. This meant that in

[107] NAA: A1838/563/6/8/1. Report of the Ninth Meeting of the Committee of Security Experts, Agenda Item 3, Consideration of the Nature and Extent of the Communist Subversive and Insurgent Threat to the Treaty Area, 28-31 October 1958.

places such as Singapore, Lim Yew Hock carried out a "courageous" and, at the time, successful campaign against subversive elements. Similarly, in Burma, rice was identified as a potential key link in the equation — where a better market for rice existed, this could reduce the need to conduct "unsatisfactory barter deals with the communist bloc," allowing it to trade more broadly. In Indonesia, at least in 1956 estimates, the communists were not included in government, but this did not preclude Sukarno from bringing them back into the political fold. Although in 1956 Burma, Singapore and Indonesia looked encouraging, this was not grounds for complacency.[108]

SEATO security experts noted a need to consider unconventional methods, because the communist parties were spreading propaganda linked to broader developments. The move towards rebellion in Hungary in 1956 would help to produce counter-propaganda. Asian parallels to this situation of a potential rebellion were considered, in China, Burma, India and Nepal. But these parallels were only discussed cursorily, and did not lead to concrete examples being followed or used in propaganda material. Australia's role in the Committee of Security Experts followed a broader appreciation by Australian officials of the importance of unconventional threats and how to address these. In late 1956, the Australian representative felt that in the following year, the committee should focus more on counter-subversion and pay more attention to economic work.[109]

[108] NAA: A1838, 2471/2 PART 2. SEATO Report, The Communist Threat to the Treaty Area, 24 October 1956.
[109] NAA: A1838, 2471/2 PART 2. Memo from Council Representative to Mr Quinn. SEATO Counter Subversion Programme, 19 December 1956.

The committee knew it required materials to deter the communist subversive threat, but Australian planners were concerned about how to produce these materials and whether they could fill a gap in research and distribution facilities in SEATO member states.

Consensus was important among member states, but while capabilities differed in terms of infrastructure, and intentions were particular to political entities and liable to change, the SEATO Committee of Security Experts determined that the SEATO Public Relations Office should highlight the incompatibility between communism and nationalism. This was important especially because different arms of broader subversive groups and parties linked to communist fronts might adopt neutralism to infiltrate not just the political realm, but also trade unions, and to influence youth. Overseas Chinese communities were particularly susceptible.[110] But such propaganda, and more importantly neutralism, was speculated to be part of a new communist strategy. This could take the form of a "new" and "soft" diplomatic, political and economic approach, which might be applied to neutralist states. This is significant because neutrality, and also neutralization, could be seen not as a political solution but as an incipient and potentially harmful threat. This was articulated in reports by the Committee of Security Experts, which saw that the pronouncements of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 as well as the September conference of the Chinese Communist

[110] See relevant documents in NAA: A1838, 2471/2 PART 2. SEATO Counter-Subversion Assessment of Cold War Threat. Numerous documents discuss the following, and thus to distil it to a single report or note is inadequate.

Party were used to promote ideology to nationalist regimes that might lead to subservience to either "Moscow or Peiping". This took the form of an appearance of promoting Asian communist parties and their collaboration with other parties, exacerbating friction among friendly Asian nations. This in turn would create a bloc of Asian nations averse to ties with the West. Thus, neutralism and nationalism were seen as threats if they were to be exploited by the greater communist powers, especially if they could be brought into subservience.[111] Australian planners encouraged members to submit examples of publicity against communism and the message of communists to the SEATO Public Relations Office. This would help the SEATO budget by placing more responsibility on member states.

This focus on the subversive element meant it was seen as a legitimate threat that required a timely response. This is evident in reports that observed Chinese funding to parties such as the Burma Workers' and Peasants' Party to make possible parliamentary representation. Similarly, disciplinary problems in Singapore's Chinese-medium schools were seen as possible links within the broader strategy.

Australian politicians such as Casey highlighted the need to link welfare and security. This was apparent, in one instance, when he delivered a speech in Karachi in 1956 to the Council of Ministers relating those two themes. In the broader Cold War context, fears of a potential Russian "Marshall Plan" could mean that Western economic aid lost its

[111] NAA: 1838, 2464/1. SEATO Counter-Subversion Work: Note for Overseas Planning Committee, 25 July 1956.

monopoly, driving countries into more neutralist camp positions. Representatives in the Committee of Security Experts encouraged activities other than propaganda to meet the communist threat.[112] Reports suggested a SEATO-based seminar to address the global threat of subversion, while UK officials in one report listed more than 34 types of subversion, including labour dispute interventions, youth and cultural movements and their infiltration, offensive and subversive broadcasts, which represented a shift to "new communist tactics".[113]

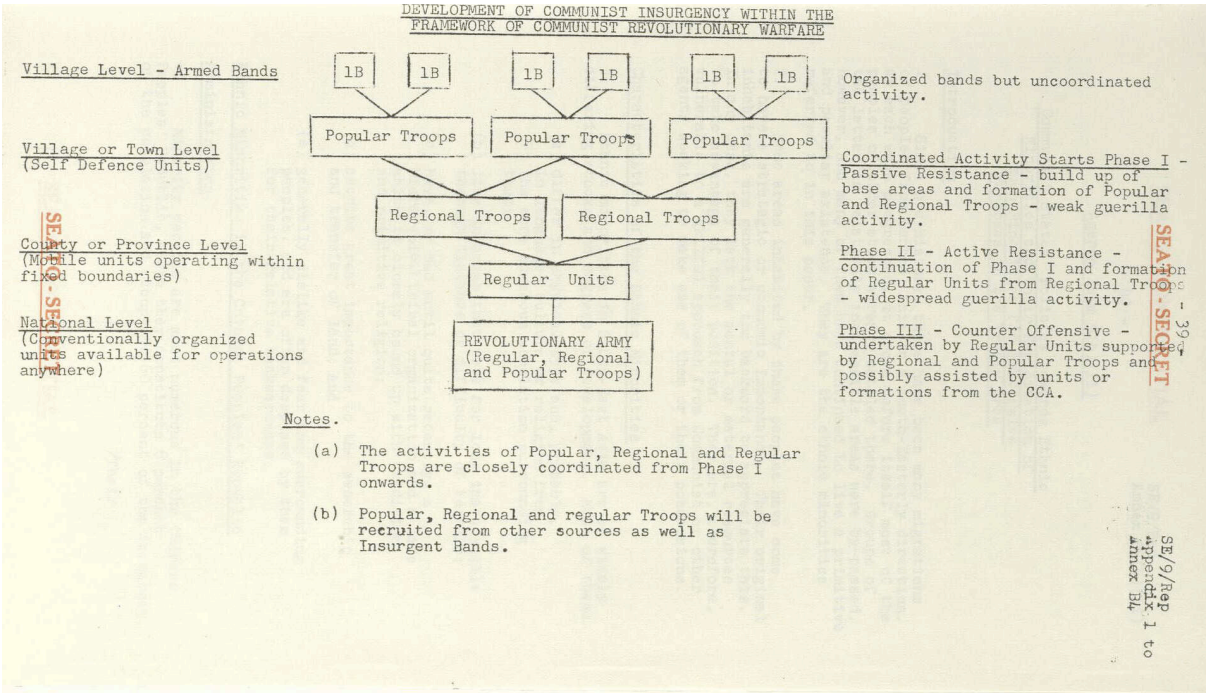
When Australian officials conferred with US representatives including Douglas MacArthur Jr., in 1956, they asked about overlaps in existing commitments, such as the Colombo Plan, and the use of SEATO in non-military terms. The outcome was to establish that SEATO should not appear to only be a military collective, but it had a long way to go to become more efficient and thus more administratively effective. This would be addressed in part by the growth in subsequent years of administrative structures within the organization.[114]

The work of the SEATO Committee of Security Experts from 1958 to 1960 focused on studying and proposing measures to counter "Communist efforts to penetrate the free countries of South-East Asia".[115] While military means and efforts were important, subversion was seen to affect political factors internal to countries, even if the threat was

[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] NAA: A1838, TS 688/3. Australian JPC Report No. 46/1956, 13 July 1956; cited also in Farrell, "Alphabet Soup and Nuclear War: SEATO, China and the Cold War in Southeast Asia", in Murfett (ed.) *Cold War Southeast Asia*, p.91; see map attached on potential areas of resistance within Thailand.
[115] NAA: A1838,563/6/8/1. SEATO Survey of Recent Developments, 3 November 1958.

sponsored from without. Studies conducted by SEATO representatives in various Southeast Asian countries included factors such as ethnography, which allowed them to assess the link and probability of the threat of communist subversion to affect ethnic minorities.[116] The broad appreciation of communist political activity through subversion would also spill into the military dimension, especially through guerilla warfare. SEATO studies would formulate a sophisticated appreciation of the guerilla threat, especially with consideration of the terrain, and rural make up of different areas determined to be at risk or already featuring such a threat.

Fig 2. SEATO Security Experts Assessment of Communist Insurgency at Different Levels and Different Phases[117]



[116] NAA: A1838, 563/8/1. Appendix 1 to Annex B4, Military Pattern of Communist Insurgency in the Treaty Area, Report of the Ninth Committee of the Committee of Security Experts, 31 October 1958.

[117] NAA: A1838, 563/8/1. Chart attached to Appendix 1 to Annex B4, Military Pattern of Communist Insurgency in the Treaty Area, Report of the Ninth Committee of the Committee of Security Experts, 31 October 1958.

Communist insurgency, and its manifestation in guerilla warfare, was a real and present threat to SEATO. This would extend to consideration of international borders as areas of refuge, in particular the Thai-Malayan border that was seen as a shelter for Malayan Communist Party elements. The problems were pronounced in Indochina, where there had been gains by communist and leftist elements in elections in Laos, as well as subversive elements operating in South Vietnam under the aegis of the Vietminh. SEATO made the realistic assessment that China or North Vietnam could provide logistical support to subversive elements in different struggles.[118]

SEATO council representatives in 1959 promoted activities to study subversion as a threat to the region, following efforts in earlier years. Based on a working paper, in February that year they agreed in principle that a second seminar on countering subversion be held under SEATO auspices, to show a serious commitment to this problem.[119]

Plan 5 and the Debacle in Laos

In November 1959, the Joint Intelligence Committee in Australia met to discuss the likely effects of SEATO military intervention in Laos. For Australian planners, it was important to note, in terms of legitimacy of acting through SEATO, the first assumption before action, "that the

[118] NAA: A1838, 563/8/1. SEATO Council Representatives. Report on Second Seminar on Countering Communist Subversion. 7 August 1959.
[119] NAA: A9947, SCR/59/R2. Record of the Second Meeting of Council Representatives. 5 February 1955.

Laotian Government has appealed to SEATO to intervene militarily".[120] But the plan here had to do with subversion becoming an existential threat to the Laotian government. Thus intervention had to be contingent on deterioration of the internal situation, but failure to intervene could mean "the almost certain disintegration of the SEATO organization itself". Military means could be considered with the possibility of a stalemate. The need to defend Laos against falling to communist subversion would spell out the fate of SEATO as a deterrent. But fixed plans to deter, if not defeat, direct communist aggression were not the game of the day. At least in Laos, SEATO planners sought to deal with unconventional threats in Plan 5 to meet the challenge of the scenario. But much like the other events of the Cold War, they did not stand still and allow for fixed solutions. Plan 5, and the consequences of not having a SEATO intervention in Laos, would expose the problems of consensus in the organization. But to say that SEATO or its members were playing a game to ignore a threat is misleading. The development of plans and their implementation was complicated by other factors, often beyond the control of member states but occurring within the broadly defined Treaty Area. But as the Australian Military Adviser put it, for any intervention to be legitimate, "the aim of a SEATO force would be to help the Laotians to help themselves".[121]

[120] NAA: A5818, Volume 12/Agendum 507. JIC Australia Report: SEATO Military Intervention — Its Likely Effects on the Situation in Laos. November 1959.
[121] Fenton, *To Cage*, p.166.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated, through a broad selection of source material relating to developments between 1955 and 1959, that characterized the development of SEATO institutionally, and Australia's place within it. Australia aimed to build a legitimate deterrent militarily, but had to make it appear politically legitimate as well. This balance was not always an easy feat. Australian planners channeled their efforts in managing and balancing responsibilities by allocating resources across commitments, ie. to meetings in SEATO, ANZUS, and ANZAM, but these did not always correspond. SEATO began to take a life of its own and through the growth of apparatuses such as the Military Planning Office, began to develop concrete plans to combat the threats of the day. But this growth did not exactly translate into organizational effectiveness in meeting the threats. Assessments may have proved timely and relevant, but they were limited to defining and conceptualizing plausible modes of action, not guarantees of intervention. The threat itself become more difficult to define, becoming more pronounced in respect to subversion across territories in the Treaty Area. Attempts by SEATO to shift its focus to this are best represented by the work of representatives in the Committee of Security Experts and MPO Plan 5, the first such plan to deal with countersubversion.

Australian policymaking at the highest levels did not change, but this coherence in political establishment and government did not imply a coherent scenario in the Cold War, which was becoming in all senses a

global conflict. Containment took a new guise under the New Look policy of the Eisenhower administration, and SEATO memoranda attests to the importance of the potential of atomic and potentially nuclear solutions to threats. Yet, as the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter notes, superior resources did not guarantee a superior doctrine. Consensus would be the key to translating superiority into effective deterrence, but differing priorities among states and their visions of legitimacy in the Treaty Area came to signify that accurate assessments and plans developed at the SEATO level did not obscure differences in capabilities, visions and intentions of the various parties privy to it. After all, structural development is not a guarantee of the implementation of a coherent strategy. Australian planners had to contend with forces outside its own ambit that would shape and influence the translation of consensus into action, such which they could only attempt to influence, but Australia, and SEATO, were subject to such forces as they were part of the design of an alliance.

Chapter 3: Consensus Lost but Forward Defence Maintained — Australia, Plan 5 and Pursuing Best Interests

"My Government's defence policy was one of forward defence: to keep any war as far as possible from our own shores; to provide Australian defence in depth; to help produce a secure environment for our neighbours, with whom we are bound to have a close association as the years go by…" — Robert Menzies, *The Measure of the Years*[122]

Australia continued to honour its obligations to its great and powerful friends in terms of committing itself to defence partnerships in the Southeast Asian region with both the US and UK, in the period 1959 to 1962. One forum that tied these nations together was SEATO. However, for it to continue to be an effective platform to coordinate western defence planning in the region, its military deterrence capabilities had to meet the most pronounced threat. The SEATO Military Planning Office had developed a range of contingency plans to meet different threats, both conventional and unconventional. But while these plans involved different levels of forces and different types of threat, the key to understanding

[122] Menzies, Robert Gordon, *The Measure of the Years*. London: Cassell, 1970, p.77.

how to meet the threats was consensus. Here, the political came into play: political legitimacy and its undermining in Laos, in particular, tested the ability of SEATO to meet such threats. Here, Australia and SEATO stood in the shadow of great ideological struggles manifested in localized expressions of conflict that at once tested sovereignty, reinforced subversion as an existential threat, and proved the difficulty of establishing consensus.

Australia continued to commit itself to the defence of the region through SEATO and its other obligations, but understood that these were means to the broader end of its grand strategy, forward defence. The symbolic basis of this is well expressed in the title of David Lee's study, *Search for Security*.[123] Security continued as a feature of strategic evaluations during and subsequent to efforts to channel resources to the Laotian question, most importantly how the region could be usurped by communist aggression, thus creating a more pronounced threat to the Australian homeland.

SEATO established plans militarily to counter threats, but the scenario did not always correspond to the threat. Often, local agency and "interaction, synthesis and partnership"[124] were more critical to the situation in the Treaty Area than the plans and intentions of superpowers, or even great powers. While plans attempted to meet scenarios,

[123] Lee, *Search*.
[124] Ricklefs, Merle C. "The Cold War in Hindsight: Local Realities and the Limits of Global Power", in Murfett (ed.), *Cold War Southeast Asia*, p.323.

"disparities in capability between SEATO allies were so vast",[125] impacting the ability of member states to contribute forces. But disparity did not spell lack of consensus; instead, in its first few years, SEATO developed not merely structures but detailed appreciations of force estimates and countries in the Treaty Area susceptible to various threats. Even so, major powers in SEATO in the late 1950s had to show not just their intent to deter but also make their contributions in terms of forces as a guarantee to an effective deterrent. This was not easy considering the sometimes global imperatives of containing communist aggression, and commitments to other regions. Britain relied on ambiguity so it "could avoid having to actually confirm the extent to which any specific SEATO force contribution of theirs would utilise the potential of Singapore," in the light of its base there. Similarly, the New Look policy in the latter half of the 1950s determined how the US could engage with SEATO but avoid NATO-style commitments.[126] This, however, spoke to broad objectives, and did not lessen the importance of meeting threats in the region both politically and militarily.

The first counter-insurgency plan, Plan 5, marked and symbolized Australian (and New Zealand) engagement with SEATO. In its formulation, Plan 5 could appear to undermine the Geneva Conference of 1954, which made it difficult to engage with prior agreements that already established legitimacy, especially considering that the International Control Commission then comprised India as one of three parties. However, India

[125] Fenton, *To Cage*, p.121.
[126] Ibid., pp.130-131.

did not oppose it as much as the British did, as the British "were reluctant to see the plan develop much beyond" a concept of operations. This is because they wanted to see how seriously the US was approaching the plan.[127] Plan 5 related directly to subversion and the deterioration in Laos. Implementation, or the lack of it, would spell the fledgling nature of consensus in orchestrating a coherent response to a situation that was fast becoming incoherent. This chapter will provide a general appreciation of the situation in Laos, explore the details and changes in approach through Plan 5, and situate Australian engagements with it. It will finish by appraising the Geneva Conference of 1962, where neutralization spelt the ineffectiveness of committing forces through SEATO and thus a lost consensus. This does not mean SEATO became ineffective after the conference, or that Australia's commitment to the organization somehow dissolved. Neither is accurate. Instead, SEATO's inability to act did not necessarily spell disaster for broader Australian strategic objectives. In fact, as Fenton shows, the organization continued to be relevant to the Americans, who saw it as a means to act with their partners in the region.

Growing French and British disenchantment with SEATO notwithstanding, it was still the preferred means by which the US sought to engage in strategic military planning with its allies in the region. It allowed the US to influence the force development and contingency planning of its allies in SEATO, particularly the regional members Australia

[127] Ibid., p.163.

and New Zealand, while able to keep much of its own contingency plans for the region to itself.[128]

This period also coincided with closer links between the US and Australia, but these were not Australia's only links or stationing of military or other resources in Southeast Asia. By the end of the 1950s, the Australian commitment to Southeast Asia had in some part aligned to the US "with apparently beneficial results for the country's prosperity and security".[129] While this was so, consistency in government at the highest levels in Australia needed to meet a different approach by its American partner. John F. Kennedy was associated with what has come to be known as flexible response, "moving forward in crises one step at a time, raising at each stage that pressure on opponents, probing their will, exploring opportunities for a settlement even while preparing to up the ante".[130] In fact, "where Kennedy really wanted flexible response was not at the nuclear or conventional levels, but with counterinsurgency. He disliked nuclear weapons and sought measures that would prevent them from being used".[131] This can be related to the broader aegis of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, and a superpower coming to embrace a different method of channelling its resources. The point was not the rejection of containment, but the application of force to different scenarios that required it. SEATO had already considered threats at the counter-

[128] Ibid.,p.179.
[129] Edwards, *Crises*, p.207.
[130] Freedman, Lawrence, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.9.
[131] Ibid., p.287.

subversion level, but the shift in focus of its most powerful member state implied that planning would emphasize this course more than others. In this sense, SEATO was always subject to the machinations of its member states.

Laos, an Associated or Protocol State in the SEATO treaty, was characterized in the postwar period mainly by struggles between the leftists, the neutralists and the rightists, which "relentlessly struggled for power and dominance."[132] Unlike Cambodia, whose Prince Norodom Sihanouk "charted Cambodia's neutralist course from the time of independence," Prince Souvanna Phouma in Laos "even at his strongest he did not wield the kind of power that Cambodia's leader did."[133] Lao political developments from 1954 to 1962, as Bruce Lockhart describes them, can be summarized in two phases. The first saw attempts to incorporate Pathet Lao forces into the Lao government and its army. A coalition was formed in 1957 when the Lao Cabinet briefly comprised Prince Souphanavong (the half-brother of Phouma) and other Pathet Lao leaders, before their arrest or escape. The second saw the rise of "an influential group of Rightists under General Phoumi Nosavan, who enjoyed the backing of the US military and CIA," but this gave impetus to a more radical group of Neutralists under Kong Le, a colonel. A second coalition was formed only after the Geneva conference in 1962.[134] In 1960, a coup

[132] Suthayut, Osornprasop, "Thailand and the Secret War in Laos: The Origins of Engagement", in Murfett (ed.) *Cold War Southeast Asia*, p.170.
[133] Lockhart, Bruce M, "The Fate of Neutralism in Cambodia and Laos", in Murfett (ed.) *Cold War Southeast Asia*, p.196; p.206.
[134] Ibid., p.207.

was launched by Kong Le, who with his Pathet Lao allies had a base supported and supplied by the Soviets, "both directly and via Vietnam."

The result of the events was well expressed by a British Cabinet Committee in 1960, that "the North Vietnamese threat to Laos and Vietnam is now the most immediate danger in the area", and subversive elements could use the hills in Laos to move from North to South Vietnam.[135] Growing subversion in the region found expression in the events unfolding in Laos, and SEATO had to act to give its deterrent credibility. In the absence of direct invasion, however, the subversive threat, and hence strategies that dealt with counter-subversion, came to the fore.

Fig 3. Map of Laos indicating Key Mekong Crossings[136]

[135] Tarling, Nicholas. *Britain and the Neutralization of Laos*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2011. pp.37-38.
[136] NAA: A940, C2956. Cabinet Submission: SEATO Military Planning to Counter Communist Insurgency in Laos, 15 December 1959.

Australian officials, assessing the situation, knew they had to come up with the forces to meet the threats. On 15 December 1959, the Australian Cabinet was briefed about potential military action in relation to the crisis in Laos, especially in terms of communist insurgency. Plan 5B under the Military Planning Office envisioned a SEATO force being introduced to help

the Laotian government deal with insurgency, and Cabinet had authorized the Australian military adviser, Admiral Roy Dowling, to support any US initiative in terms of this plan.[137] Dowling spoke to his US counterpart, Admiral Harry Felt, during the SEATO meetings in September that year, when it was revealed to him that the US were prepared to "nominate substantial forces" under the plan. In the light of this, Dowling asked for:

— Infantry battalion with supporting arms

— Fighter squadron with appropriate air transport for the Australian force

— Destroyers in support

Cabinet approved this in late September, but with the important caveat that such a contribution need not equate to a military intervention in Laos, which had to be reviewed by the government in the future depending on the circumstances.[138] During the SEATO military advisers conference, it was made clear that the operational plan was to support Laotian efforts, and to be seen to deter, and not merely present overwhelming force. But Australia appreciated the gravity of the situation, and was still willing to contribute to SEATO. The government ordered the Australian ambassador in Washington to communicate to the US State Department that Australia supported the need for SEATO preparedness, in the event of the failure of United Nations action in Laos, and that if military intervention should be necessary (other than a United Nations

[137] NAA: A4940, C2956. Cabinet Minute "SEATO Military Planning to Counter Communist Insurgency in Laos". 15 December 1959.
[138] NAA: A4940, C2956. Cabinet Minute SEATO Military Planning to Counter Communist Insurgency in Laos. 22 September 1959.

military force), this should be under SEATO and not a unilateral US operation. In the event of a SEATO intervention, Australia would wish to participate in both the planning and the execution.[139]

At that time, Joint Intelligence Committee estimates demonstrated a concern about Communist China instigating a North Vietnam attack, to test SEATO's ability to react. Nuclear retaliation might be a deterrent against China in a possible scenario involving South Vietnam, but the issue was the credibility of the US guarantee to South Vietnam. This problematized Chinese involvement as a direct result of overt military aggression by North Vietnam, but such was only an appreciation, as it envisioned potential scenarios with plausible measurements of deterrent capabilities.[140] In some sense mirroring SEATO's development of plans, the deterrent capacity could be legitimate only in relative terms, and thus this meant that all appreciations were subject to the actions, capabilities and broader strategic objectives of the enemy. Westad notes that the battles waged in "Third World" areas during the Cold War "intensified the superpower conflict through international interventions and increased the cost of the competition, while destroying many of the societies in which the battles were carried out."[141] This thesis suggests that such destruction need not be actual (though it was in some instances), but the potential to wage destructive war was a key facet of so-called peripheral conflicts.

[139] Ibid.
[140] NAA: A7940, SEATO | 1 PART 1. JIC Report No. 36/1959 "Review of Military Threat to the Treaty Area" 4 November 1959.
[141] Westad, Odd Arne. "The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century", in Westad & Leffler, *Cambridge Cold War Vol.1*, p.10.

Lamenting the problems of coordination in SEATO in 1960, planners noted that even in the Treaty Area, the SEATO idea had "never taken any deep root." The report also noted that the Asian countries sought to use SEATO to secure aid, and as an insurance policy in foreign affairs. The lament went further that "probably only by Australia and perhaps New Zealand is SEATO regarded as a real preparation for war in which Australian troops may have to fight." Apart from establishing closer relations with Thailand, Australian officials noted, the relevance of SEATO had waned. The American guarantee had become the most critical factor in trying to maintain consensus in the organization.[142]

By 1961, SEATO military advisers agreed that the main purpose of a proposed force in responding to a Laotian request for assistance was to "maintain the morale of the Laotian forces and to increase their capacity to carry out effective operations". This included logistics, psychological warfare and air support. In particular, Australian forces would be drawn in the air component, in both combat and transport roles.[143] Assessing the political implications for Australian attitudes to military intervention, a report acknowledged the US potential to propose intervention through SEATO but noted that Australia's "failure to support collective SEATO action would not only tend to influence the United Kingdom and New Zealand against it, but would also have a discouraging effect on Asian members. It is unlikely that SEATO could survive the divisions which

[142] NAA: A1838/269. TS 563/6/8. SEATO Assessment, 21 March 1960.
[143] NAA: A4940, C2956. Joint Intelligence Committee Australia. Military Situation in Laos as at 28th March 1961, 28 March 1961.

would result."[144] Such an existential point was not lost at the time, nor has it been lost on scholars studying the organization. Pearson, who dealt with the New Zealand role in SEATO, put it clearly: "SEATO's failure to respond effectively [in Laos] led to the partial collapse of political cooperation in the alliance."[145] It was also noted that, like the earlier point about an evolving situation requiring modifications of earlier plans, the insurgents, into 1961, "are now organized on a more formal military basis … the Laotian Government is now faced not only with Communist insurgency but also a 'neutralist' revolt under Kong Le (now integrated with the Pathet Lao) and a falling off in political support."[146]

While the consensus was eventually lost, this was not the only platform in organizational planning where intentions diverged in planning against common scenarios. The Military Planning Office may have advocated Plan 5, but the Committee of Security Experts on many occasions pointed out the lack of alignment between political and military objectives.[147] It was also becoming clear that subversion was spreading in mainland Southeast Asia. Plan 5 may have envisaged a military-type intervention in Laos, but did not cover events elsewhere. Here the idea of the Cold War as beyond the control of planners is seen in how planners tried to control and manage its spread. SEATO developed Plan 8 in response to Thai requests to "meet any future insurgency in the north of

[144] NAA: A4940, C2956. Annex B. "Laos — Political Implications of Military Intervention and of Australian Attitude to It", 28 March 1961.
[145] Pearson, *Paper*, p.66.
[146] NAA: A8447, 16/1961. Heydon and Landau to Tange (Australian Embassy Bangkok), "Present Military Implications for Australia of SEATO Military Planning Office Plan 5C", 27 March 1961.
[147] Ibid., pp.64-66.

the country."[148] Interestingly, when developing one form of this plan, Thailand rejected a draft of Plan 8/63, suggesting it did not require SEATO military assistance but rather in the form of civic action. This had serious implications for developmental and political legitimacy, especially because the aid Thailand envisioned would be "economic and development aid for those areas of strategic concern, such as the north-east of Thailand", but this was only after the failure of military intervention in Laos, when, as Fenton suggests, "SEATO as a whole, had taken a battering."[149]

It would be wrong to assume that plans other than Plan 5 were discarded in the wake of the crisis in Laos. In fact, overlaps with other plans meant Australian planners had to allocate resources and manage defence obligations. In one instance, in terms of ANZAM planning and the use of bomber forces in SEATO operations from bases in Butterworth and Tengah, Australian, UK and New Zealand forces operated from Plan 4 and 6 scenarios, even in 1962. They saw that even a threat to the security of the bases need not compromise the security of the area, and this was helped by an appreciation that in "the present Chinese Communist Order-of-Battle there appears to be little likelihood of an appreciable air threat developing against Butterworth and even less against Singapore", until about 1964.[150] As has been seen, the plans covering SEATO intervention in the region had to encompass and deal with the fluidity of the situation

[148] Ibid., p.66.
[149] Fenton, *To Cage*, p.198.
[150] NAA: A8447, 51/1962. "Brief for the Australian Representative to the ANZAM Defence Committee Meeting 9 August 1962: Implications on the Defence of Malaya of the Removal of Forces Declared to SEATO Plans 4 & 6", 2 August 1962.

on the ground. South Vietnam fell directly into the ambit of communist insurgency, if not direct invasion from North Vietnam.

Australian Joint Intelligence Committee considerations of possible SEATO or US intervention in South Vietnam included the problems of countering covert intervention by the North, and the deliberations give us a good indication, in a handwritten note from 1961, as to the problem at hand:

> What from the military point of view would be the requirements of successful action? How many troops? What would be their roles? Would we have to take over direction of South Vietnamese intelligence (this may be the key to success)? Answers to these questions are important not only for their own sake but because the scale and nature of Western intervention will have important (text unclear) on nature of DRV reaction…[151]

Here again, the legitimacy of potential action in the eyes of Asian states was not lost on the planners. For example, "the Indians are torn between their desire to prevent a Communist victory in South Vietnam and their inability to align themselves with the West to prevent it."[152] Australian officials continued to be concerned with Asian opinion, and this linked with prior objectives to integrate and manage the agendas of newly independent countries, but this could only go so far. The implementation in times that demanded numerous responsibilities to be distributed with limited resources was a challenge.

The contiguity of terrain and its use by subversive elements posed a challenge to intervention in specific territorial zones. Australian

[151] NAA: A1838, 666/61/30. Joint Intelligence Committee Agendum No. 121/1961, Handwritten Note. "Military Implications of United States or SEATO Intervention in South Vietnam", 13 October 1961.
[152] NAA: A1838, 666/61/30. Joint Intelligence Committee 666(61)/30. L.H. Border (Head, Intel Coordination) to Mr Loomes. Comments on Supplement No.1, 1 November 1961.

intelligence understood this point, especially in its appreciation of the influence of the North Vietnamese in places such as Laos, through use of access routes as well. But this did not mean that involvement of Communist China was a fait accompli. In fact, in one appreciation in 1961, it was seen that "it is unlikely that Communist China would react violently unless she decided that her national interests were involved."[153] It was clear to Australian officials that a broader strategic landscape eclipsed insurgent intentions and capabilities, and that intervention had consequences and was not always a guarantee, especially with the major communist powers. This can be also seen in a note on the situation in South Vietnam in January 1962, that the "Viet Cong will probably step up their operations but would probably be restrained — particularly by the USSR — from all-out attacks," considering that US large-scale intervention would follow, among other factors.[154]

It would be problematic to intervene in scenarios of fluctuation, and if variables such as potential Geneva settlements to decide the fate of Laos were interrupted by intervention. Planners had to tread carefully, and this meant balancing aspirations towards supporting an amicable settlement while facing a possible accusation that a neutral government was subject to territorial intervention by the US and SEATO. This would have consequences not just for the appearance of legitimacy but for the broader Cold War. A Souvanna Phouma government looking for support in

[153] NAA: A1838, 666/61/30 JIC (AUST) (61) 30: Military Implications of United States or SEATO Intervention South Vietnam, 27 October 1961.
[154] Ibid.

such a scenario could be met by willing aid donors from the Communist bloc.[155] While this was so, and while Australia wanted to focus on legitimate action, "Cabinet decided that Australia would be prepared to participate in a military intervention in Laos under United States leadership, preferably in a SEATO context," on three separate occasions, September 1959, March and May 1961.[156]

This should not imply that the Australians were inevitably drawn to US intentions and actions and had somehow departed from their alternative obligations — thus demonstrating that overlaps continued as a pertinent force. How many troops they could contribute on the ground had to take into account existing force guarantees, such as through ANZAM. Not least because it might need to deploy forces stationed in Malaysia and Singapore to potential scenarios involving Laos, this had implications for Australia and broader British Defence Coordinating Committee (Far East) policy, which in October 1959 created a plan, Buckram, to meet the demands of the 28 Commonwealth Brigade contribution to Laos. One statement by Australian planners put it rather well, that coordinating and maintaining obligations with the British could become embarrassing if "United Kingdom's political decision were against repeat against intervention."[157] A greater voice for Australia did not mean abandoning its traditional interests, but it did lead to a search for other guarantees, marked by a deeper need to ensure its survival strategically.

[155] NAA: A1838, 666/61/30. L.H. Border to Department of External Affairs. "South Vietnam", 16 January 1962.
[156] Edwards, *Crises*, p.227
[157] Hack, Karl. *Defence and Decolonization in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore 1941-1968.* Richmond: Curzon, 2001, pp.245-247.

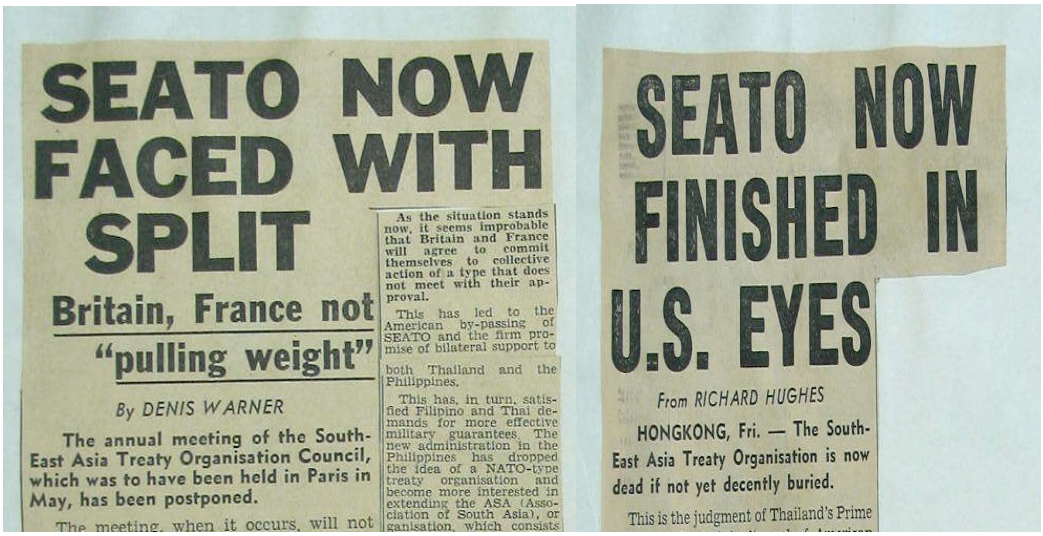
A loss of territory could lead to "the subversion of Indonesia, leaving communism 'at the very threshold of our northern door'."[158] Karl Hack puts Australia's dilemma of balancing commitments well: Its growing faith in SEATO "increasingly meant taking a separate, though preferably not conflicting line with Britain."[159]

The neutralization of Laos was a classic case of divisions among allies of the same camp. Divergences over the approach to Communist China mirrored the divergence between a superpower with growing challenges, the US, and a declining great power, the UK, in trying to manage this common challenge. In all fairness, this divergence did not lead to a complete parting of the ways, but instead manifested itself in diplomacy that found conciliation through common platforms, such as SEATO, problematic. Here, overlaps and timing took a different form: that of two different approaches to managing a changing regional situation. The UK "was anxious to avoid a war it might have to take part and might become a wider war," and so saw neutralization as possibly a template for a states system solution to the crisis. For the US, a statement by Secretary of State Dean Rusk embodies the position well, in terms of not replicating the Laos settlement in Vietnam, "friendly and United States public opinion would not accept this; isolationism would increase. NATO allies have questioned our resolve on Laos. Laos is a bad precedent."[160] Old differences in approach did not tell newer stories for other powers

[158] Ibid. p.184. Hack uses a speech made by Menzies for the statement catalogued as WO 216/912.
[159] Ibid., p.246.
[160] Tarling, *Neutralization*, pp.434-438

either. The settlement in Laos depended on a legitimate resolution, but the use of terminologies, evident since Geneva in 1954, played out once again, as "the North Vietnamese did not feel bound by the provision against using Laos for interfering in the affairs of another state because they regarded North and South Vietnam as one state".[161] The two news clippings below demonstrate the mood in Australian journalism in early 1962, by two prominent voices reporting the region to a national audience, Denis Warner and Richard Hughes:

Fig 4. News Clippings on the Fate of SEATO, March 1962[162]



SEATO NOW FACED WITH SPLIT

Britain, France not "pulling weight"

By DENIS WARNER

The annual meeting of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation Council, which was to have been held in Paris in May, has been postponed.

The meeting, when it occurs, will not

As the situation stands now, it seems improbable that Britain and France will agree to commit themselves to collective action of a type that does not meet with their approval.

This has led to the American by-passing of SEATO and the firm promise of bilateral support to both Thailand and the Philippines.

This has, in turn, satisfied Filipino and Thai demands for more effective military guarantees. The new administration in the Philippines has dropped the idea of a NATO-type treaty organisation and become more interested in extending the ASA (Association of South Asia), or ganisation, which consists

SEATO NOW FINISHED IN U.S. EYES

From RICHARD HUGHES

HONGKONG, Fri. — The South-East Asia Treaty Organisation is now dead if not yet decently buried.

This is the judgment of Thailand's Prime

SEATO's growing pains had serious implications for Australian motivations, yet they did not cripple Australian defence priorities, or deter Australia from pursuing the broader objective to maintain forward defence as a cornerstone of its own security. This is important when consideringg

[161] Ibid., p.447

[162] See NAA: A5954, 1109/8, for news clippings attached to files compiled by relevant agency.

developments in this period, especially in 1962. The key here is the Rusk-Thanat agreement, of 6 March 1962, which "permitted the United States to undertake unilateral action under the treaty without reference to the then existing treaty organization …." While Buszynski indicates that this was not the end of SEATO, and actually reinforced the fact that agreement among allies was not as important as ability to act through its provisions, this allusion to symbolic action did not negate the pressing need to determine a course in the face of consensus breaking down.[163] While Southeast Asia was a strategic priority, it was not Australia's only international commitment. Compounding the problem of consensus in SEATO was growing disenchantment in the UK and France, and the growing US need to assert its anti-communist credentials with force in Indochina.

Especially in this period, timing and commitments came to the fore for Australians. At the highest levels, a growing need to align itself with the American efforts in the region was met with the "inadequacies of Australian defence resources to meet the growing number of crises in Southeast Asia." While Cabinet in Australia saw that a potential force commitment to Vietnam was better channelled through the use of a SEATO force, because of the need to display its commitment to political legitimacy "it did not wish to be part of a conflict in Asia 'which would be almost exclusively between white and coloured', and noted that forces should only be sent at the request of the country which the forces were to

[163] Buszynski, Les. "Thailand and the Manila Pact". *The World Today*, 36: 2, 1980, p.46.

enter."[164] Legitimacy was the thread that tied together the imperatives of timeliness and overlaps; it was pursued even in the face of major alterations to collective security agreements; and it was used to bolster an active commitment while still retaining a cautious approach that was inclusive.

The growing emphasis on other strategic objectives did not mean a departure from Australia's role in SEATO. It continued to contribute to various schemes at civilian and military levels. One example of civilian contribution was in education. Detailed records were kept on professorships, such as a SEATO professorship in Organic Chemistry at the University of Medical Science in Bangkok. Professor D.E. White, an Australian academic specializing in the field, applied for this. The application was forwarded to relevant national authorities, in this case the Department of External Affairs in Canberra, and they made comments as they saw fit.[165] Political conflicts over members and their roles in the organization could also spill into the realm of cultural activities. In a handwritten note on a proposed exhibition of Muslim art in Australia, officials pointed out that this could not just reinforce ties with Southeast Asia, but also address criticisms by Thailand, the Philippines and Pakistan that "there is not enough support from the non-Asian SEATO members for SEATO's cultural activities."[166]

[164] Edwards, *Crises*, pp.233-241.
[165] NAA: A1838, 2474/5/1. SEATO Professorship Programme, 3 October 1961.
[166] NAA: A1838, 2474/1 Part 5. Handwritten Note by External Affairs Official "SEATO Exhibition of Muslim Art", 19 July 1963.

Nicholas Tarling's framework of neutralization, neutralism and neutrality acts as a prosthesis to help us understand the numerous challenges to sovereignty, and by extension legitimacy, in this period, but it does not include all the factors at play.[167] The link is counterinsurgency as a complicating factor in the Cold War in the region, with special reference to growing US focus on this. This was, as Blaufarb notes, not limited to the region, but in the eyes of its principal foe "the Soviet premier himself [Khrushchev] made the point, citing Cuba, Vietnam, and Algeria as current examples of just wars."[168] Willy-nilly the broader aegis gave Australia a global set of responsibilities with a direct focus on securing its shores by dealing with Southeast Asia. This also meant dealing with other territorial claims not related to the broader ideological currents of the time, but to older colonial and post-colonial claims. One instance was New Guinea, where in 1959, in the House of Representatives, Menzies said Australia must recognize Dutch sovereignty based on its prior recognition. Menzies, particularly astute in legal reasoning, declared that Australia should support such a claim against Indonesia in the interest of the indigenous population and self-determination.[169] The issue was that Indonesia's attempt to impose control had national security implications for Australia. These may have meant a possibility of Australian forces acting without support from its allies, in a potential

[167] See Tarling, *Neutralization*.
[168] Blaufarb, Douglas S. *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance*. New York: The Free Press, 1977, p. 53.
[169] NLA MS. 4396. Papers of Sir Robert Menzies. "Statement by the Prime Minister (Mr. Menzies), In the House of Representatives … Indonesia and West New Guinea …. ," 24 February 1959.

scenario envisioned over "conflict with Indonesia over West New Guinea or a limited war with Indonesia while American and other SEATO forces were fully engaged elsewhere".[170] West New Guinea threatened to cause a strain on Australian and American relations, but the relationship with the US remained a key policy prerogative for Australia despite such tensions.

Conclusion

The debacle in Laos ended without a fixed solution to the problem of subversion in Southeast Asia after 1962. In fact, SEATO plans in the same years, for instance towards Thailand, highlighted the remaining threat of subversion to compromise the legitimacy of governments in the region. Australian planners used SEATO to grow determination to meet the threat posed by communist aggression, but plans could work only if there was consensus. The loss of consensus over Plan 5 and the neutralization of Laos, with the Rusk-Thanat Agreement in 1962, meant that SEATO could not put into action its military plans to deter if not defeat communist threats to the area. This was not the end of the organization, but it underscored a growing need for Australian planners to focus on other means to achieve forward defence. Menzies and others were convinced that SEATO succeeded in deterring armed attack which gave the region a

[170] Edwards, *Crises*, p. 205.

seven-year breathing space,[171] but developments did not stand still. Growing concerns over the territorial integrity of South Vietnam and a shift towards a broader American commitment via its strategic imperative of flexible response meant that SEATO as a deterrent could not be the only option. But options to avoid a singular defence guarantee were manifold. This, alas, bore out the lessons of the failure of the Singapore strategy — but did not imply divergence from planning beside Commonwealth partners, or even the UK. SEATO became a means to an end, but the broader principle of legitimacy as an organizing factor in the political and military sense remained a priority for Australia in the region and more broadly. Laos, and by extension the Cold War in Southeast Asia, can be seen as a metaphor for situations radically altering and even compromising plans, especially on a multilateral basis.

Conclusion

The narrative of Australian involvement in SEATO, and by extension its engagement with the postwar world with special reference to the

[171] Menzies, *Measure*, pp.55-60.

Southeast Asian region, between 1954 and 1962, is telling in four broad respects. First, by employing an empirical approach, one can evaluate, from declassified source material, the role of an actor in a position between finding and building independent capabilities, but also leveraging different means to engage great powers to advance its own interests. Second, it provides an insight into the workings of a security alliance that brings together divergent interests, and shows it is not inevitable that powers so arranged are by implication in an asymmetrical relationship. Third, it demonstrates the complex interaction between decolonization and the Cold War, and shows how powers tried to meet threats at different levels, especially to deter communist aggression. Fourth, it allows a scholar to make a historiographical contribution to scholarship on the Cold War, that brings to light hitherto "peripheral" areas. The focus on a periphery, in this case, does not destabilize the bipolar structure of the ideological struggle the conflict came to embody. It does, however, tell us how ideology interacted with other priorities, and the examination of grand strategy when there was technically no global conflict of the intensity of a total war can still show how players dealt with other forms of conflicts, and mobilised the tools of statecraft to meet the ends of forward defence.

Australia sought to leverage on its great power allies and other partners through collective security agreements after the Second World War, especially ANZUS, ANZAM and SEATO, but these were not exclusive zones of interest. Nor were they the only means, complemented by an

agenda of development, such as through the Colombo Plan. Australia found consensus and cooperation key to its own interests, but could also bring in great power involvement, as well as complement its own resource limitations. These limitations did not deter Australian planners from pursuing their agenda in Southeast Asia. This was partly because of the need to commit resources to gain a place in inner circles that comprised the US, UK and New Zealand, and to maintain traditional links, especially through its commitments in ANZAM. But Australians genuinely wanted to pursue an inclusive agenda, to a degree, of bringing Asian voices into the organization that was to become SEATO. This concern with inclusiveness did not deter Australia from pursuing military effectiveness through different machinery and its commitments to its allies. Whether supporting development or later military efforts in South Vietnam, the US "recognized the value of working with Australia."[172]

Australia's interest in legitimising its role in SEATO and promoting legitimacy through the organization meant it needed to focus on timeliness and allocate resources by overlapping commitments. The balance between the two was not always easy. Australia sought to build SEATO's capabilities, but knew this would depend on commitment by other powers to the organization and the creation of structures to support its growing responsibilities. Through the Military Planning Office, the Council, civil activities and security experts, Australia contributed to expanding the role of the organization. However, it had to face the

[172] Frankum, *Silent*, p.4.

problem of disparate capabilities, especially in intelligence, between the great powers and Asian members. This relates back to concerns about sharing information among all members, with early suspicions about the reliability of Asian states in this regard.

SEATO's structures and civilian political and military representatives standardized its operating procedures, and so it was able to present a capable working organization. However, capabilities depended on constituent members, and consensus was the driving force to turn capabilities into coordinated action. This was complicated by the conflicts of the Cold War in the region, as well as divergence in the interests of member states. But these differences already existed while SEATO was being formed, when the US signed a special reservation on its understanding of aggression. Underlying factors became reinforced by changing realities, that stressed the divergence between the US and the UK over approaches to sovereignty, especially because the US had not been privy to the Geneva Agreements of 1954, while the UK, as a chairman, sought to continue to play such a role. Australia sought to tie together its big power guarantors through SEATO, which allowed it to forward its defence imperatives without abandoning prior arrangements in ANZUS and ANZAM. SEATO also allowed it to integrate and reinforce commitments to prior arrangements, notably in its defence of Malaya. This presented opportunities of force allocation, but also tensions due to the use of forces in potential SEATO Plan 5 scenarios that was not welcomed by the nationalist and newly independent Malayan government.

Australia pursued the development of legitimacy to reinforce forward defence, but understandings of legitimacy, especially in terms of subversion and communist aggression, posed challenges to SEATO and Australian commitment to the organization. Subversion as a problem meant developing plans that were viable under SEATO, which comprised both development and propaganda efforts, as well as policing measures, alongside military intervention. But the growth of the subversive threat, with SEATO's failure to implement Plan 5 in Laos, its counter-insurgency plan, meant the deterrent value of the organization itself was put into question. The shift towards more bilateral security arrangements, especially the US agreement with Thailand in 1962, did not negate or nullify SEATO, but did shift emphasis away from it as a principal instrument to meet threats in the region, towards other solutions. Australian planners were not paralysed by such a shift, but had to work to meet the demands of the situation in a timely fashion, to continue to meet its strategic objectives.

Consistency in a defence and foreign policy objective did not lend coherence to the events and situations that planners faced. After all, Australian intentions were only one factor in a situation with many variables. But orthodox scholarship on SEATO, best represented by the work of Buszynski,[173] which implied that the organization was ineffective because it could not meet the threats it set out to meet, lacks a more nuanced appraisal of deterrence. SEATO's ability to deter does merit

[173] Buszynski, *Failure*.

attention, especially when declassified documents reveal an attempt to build deterrent capacity in a number of ways. Political and military legitimacy pursued by Australian officials through SEATO meant addressing situations that were less than coherent. Continuity in administration had an effect on this, especially the long-serving coalition under Menzies. But continuity should not suggest overwhelming consensus. Actions taken needed to be justified to the Australian people, through parliament and other means. The use of force could not be applied without first being linked to appropriate goals. Personalities such as Shedden, Casey and Barwick, along with Tange and others, demonstrated the vitality of the personal touch in the highest levels of government, so vividly illustrated by Evatt in the immediate postwar years. However, this vitality was constrained by a growing level of bureaucratic coherence. By 1962, Australian officials were active players in the global arena, even more so in Southeast Asia. One could almost be surprised to learn that in the first half of the 20th century, Australian foreign policy can be read as a "proto-policy",[174] especially compared with the energy with which it pursued its goals from after the war to 1962. But this should not be equated with Australian predominance in global affairs, nor should it suggest a preponderance of regional influence. Australia was caught amid the spectre of ideological struggles, the rise of nationalism, and attempts to deter communist aggression when it sought to promote benevolent development objectives and develop more of its own voice in

[174] Beaumont (et al.), *Ministers*, p.3.

global affairs. It did so with a careful but principled approach, and pursued a course which emphasized its own security. SEATO was but one path that formed the overall course, and thus a shift of emphasis away from SEATO did not steer Australia away from its overall route.

Appendix 1

Text of Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty

Source: http://australianpolitics.com/topics/foreign/seato-treaty-text

Preamble

The parties to this treaty,

- Recognizing the sovereign equality of all the parties.
- Reiterating their faith in the purposes and principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all Governments,
- Reaffirming that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, they uphold the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and declaring that they will earnestly strive by every peaceful means to promote self-government and to secure the independence of all countries whose peoples desire it and are able to undertake its responsibilities,
- Desiring to strengthen the fabric of peace and freedom and to uphold the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, and to promote the economic well-being and development of all peoples in the treaty area,
- Intending to declare publicly and formally their sense of unity, so that any potential aggressor will appreciate that the parties stand together in the area, and
- Desiring further to co-ordinate their efforts for collective defence for the preservation of peace and security,

Therefore, agree as follows:

Article 1

The parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international disputes, in which they may be involved, by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

Article 2

In order more effectively to achieve the objective of this treaty, the parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack and to prevent and counter subversive activities directed from without against their territorial integrity and political stability.

Article 3

The parties undertake to strengthen their free institutions and to co-operate with one another in the further development of economic measures, including technical assistance, designed both to promote economic progress and social well-being and to further the individual and collective efforts of governments towards these ends.

Article 4

1. Each party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the parties or against any state or territory which the parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. Measures taken under this paragraph shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations.
2. If, in the opinion of any of the parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any party in the treaty area or of any other state or territory to which the provisions of Paragraph I of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which would be taken for the common defence.
3. It is understood that no action on the territory of any state designated by unanimous agreement under Paragraph I of this Article or on any territory so designated shall be taken except at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned.

Article 5

The parties hereby establish a council, on which each of them shall be represented, to consider matters concerning the implementation of this treaty. The council shall provide for consultation with regard to military and any other planning as the situation obtaining in the treaty area may

from time to time require. The council shall be so organized as to be able to meet at any time.

Article 6

This treaty does not affect and shall not be interpreted as affecting in any way the rights and obligations of any of the parties under the Charter of the United Nations or the responsibility of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. Each party declares that none of the international engagements now in force between it and any other of the parties or any third party is in conflict with the provisions of this treaty, and undertakes not to enter into any international engagement in conflict with this treaty.

Article 7

Any other state in a position to further the objectives of this treaty and to contribute to the security of the area may, by unanimous agreement of the parties, be invited to accede to this treaty. Any state so invited may become a party to the treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines shall inform each of the parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession.

Article 8

As used in this treaty, the "treaty area" is the general area of Southeast Asia, including also the entire territories of the Asian parties, and the general area of the Southwest Pacific not including the Pacific area north of 21 degrees 30 minutes north latitude. The parties may, by unanimous agreement, amend this Article to include within the treaty area the territory of any state acceding to this treaty in accordance with Article 7 or otherwise to change the treaty area.

Article 9

1. This treaty shall be deposited in the archives of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. Duly certified copies thereof shall be transmitted by that Government to the other signatories.
2. The treaty shall be ratified and its provisions carried out by the parties in accordance with their respective constitutional processes. The instruments of ratification shall be deposited as soon as possible with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, which shall notify all of the other signatories of such deposit.

3. The treaty shall enter into force between the states which have ratified it as soon as the instruments of ratification of a majority of the signatories shall have been deposited, and shall come into effect with respect to each other state on the date of the deposit of its instrument of ratification.

Article 10

This treaty shall remain in force indefinitely, but any party may cease to be a party one year after its notice of denunciation has been given to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, which shall inform the Governments of the other parties of the deposit of each notice of denunciation.

Article 11

The English text of this treaty is binding on the parties, but when the parties have agreed to the French text thereof and have so notified the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, the French text shall be equally authentic and binding on the parties.

Understanding of U.S.A.

The United States of America in executing the present treaty does so with the understanding that its recognition of the effect of aggression and armed attack and its agreement with reference thereto in Article 4, Paragraph I, apply only to communist aggression but affirms that in the event of the aggression or armed attack it will consult under the provisions of Article 4, paragraph 2.

Done at Manila eighth day of September, 1954. [The treaty was signed by the principal members of all eight delegations at the Conference.]

The Protocol

Designation of states and territory as to which provisions of Article 4 and Article 3 are to be applicable:

- The parties to the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty unanimously designate for the purpose of Article 4 of the treaty the states of Cambodia and Laos and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the state of Vietnam. The parties further agree that the above mentioned states and territory shall be eligible in respect of the economic measures contemplated by Article 3.

This protocol shall come into force simultaneously with the coming into force of the treaty.

In witness whereof the undersigned plenipotentiaries have signed this protocol to the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty.

Done at Manila eighth day of September, 1954.

The Pacific Charter

The delegates of the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines,

- Desiring to establish a firm basis for common action to maintain peace and security in Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific;
- Convinced that common action to this end, in order to be worthy and effective, must be inspired by the highest principles of justice and liberty;

Do hereby proclaim:

- First, in accordance with provisions of the United Nations Charter, they uphold the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and they will earnestly strive by every peaceful means to promote the self-government and to secure the independence of all countries whose peoples desire in and are able to undertake its responsibilities;
- Second, they are each prepared to continue taking effective practical measures to ensure conditions favourable to the orderly achievement of the foregoing purposes in accordance with their constitutional processes;
- Third, they will continue to co-operate in the economic, social and cultural fields in order to promote higher living standards, economic progress and social well-being in this region;
- Fourth, as declared in the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty, they are determined to prevent or counter by appropriate means any attempt in the treaty area to subvert their freedom or to destroy their sovereignty or territorial integrity. Proclaimed at Manila, this eighth day of September, 1954.

Appendix 2

SEATO Operational Plans 1956-1965

Source: Fenton, Damien. To Cage the Red Dragon: SEATO and the Defence of Southeast Asia, 1955-1965. Singapore: NUS Press, 2012, p. 75

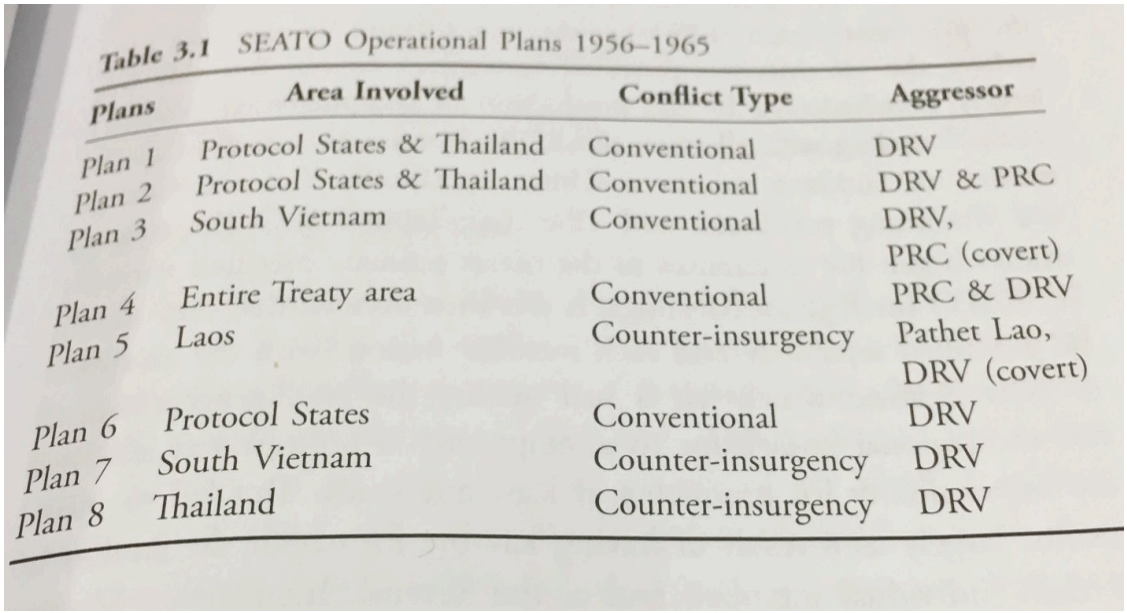


Table 3.1 SEATO Operational Plans 1956–1965

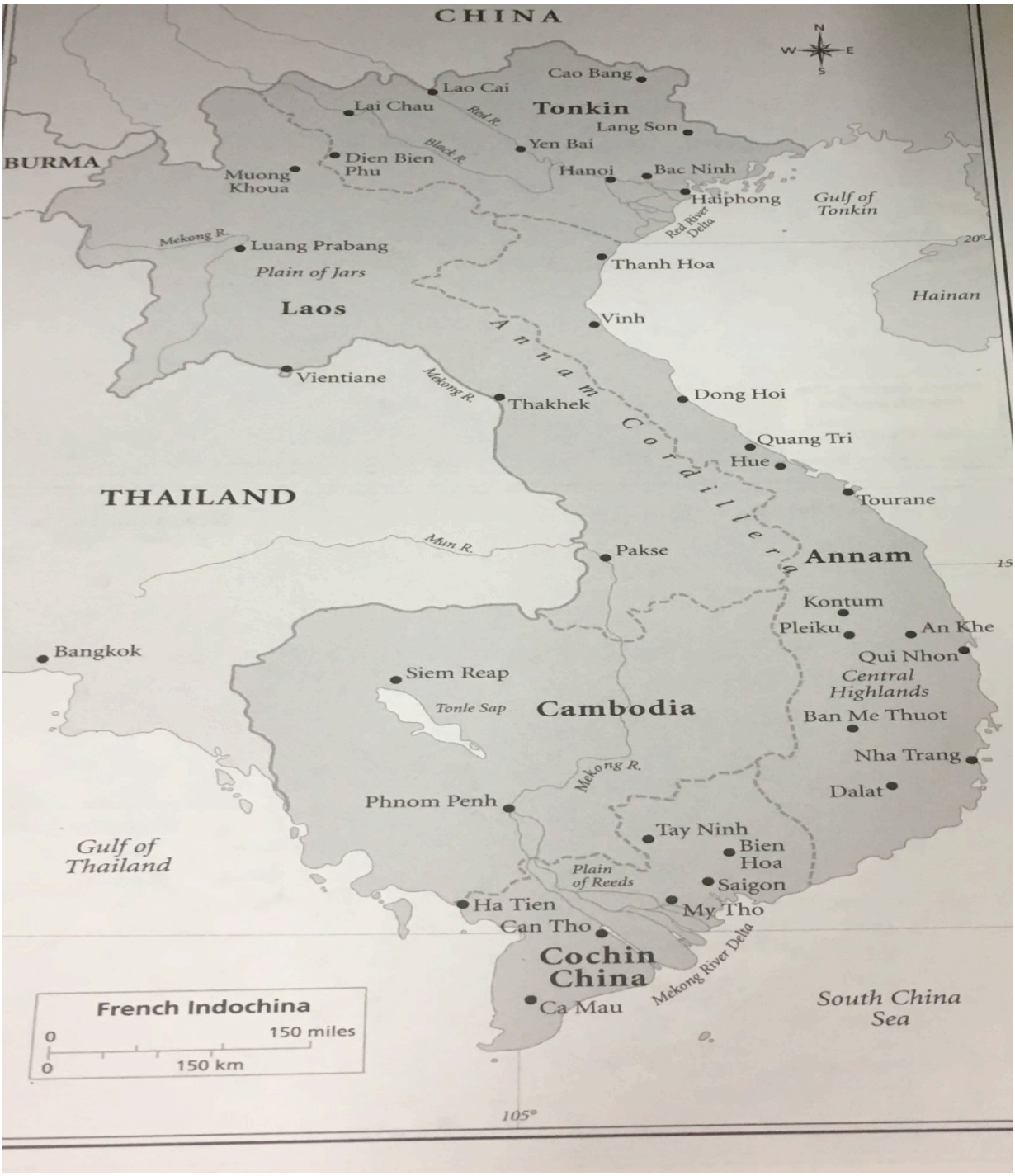
Plans	Area Involved	Conflict Type	Aggressor
Plan 1	*Protocol States & Thailand*	Conventional	DRV
Plan 2	*Protocol States & Thailand*	Conventional	DRV & PRC
Plan 3	*South Vietnam*	Conventional	DRV, PRC (covert)
Plan 4	*Entire Treaty area*	Conventional	PRC & DRV
Plan 5	*Laos*	Counter-insurgency	Pathet Lao, DRV (covert)
Plan 6	*Protocol States*	Conventional	DRV
Plan 7	*South Vietnam*	Counter-insurgency	DRV
Plan 8	*Thailand*	Counter-insurgency	DRV

Appendix 3

Maps

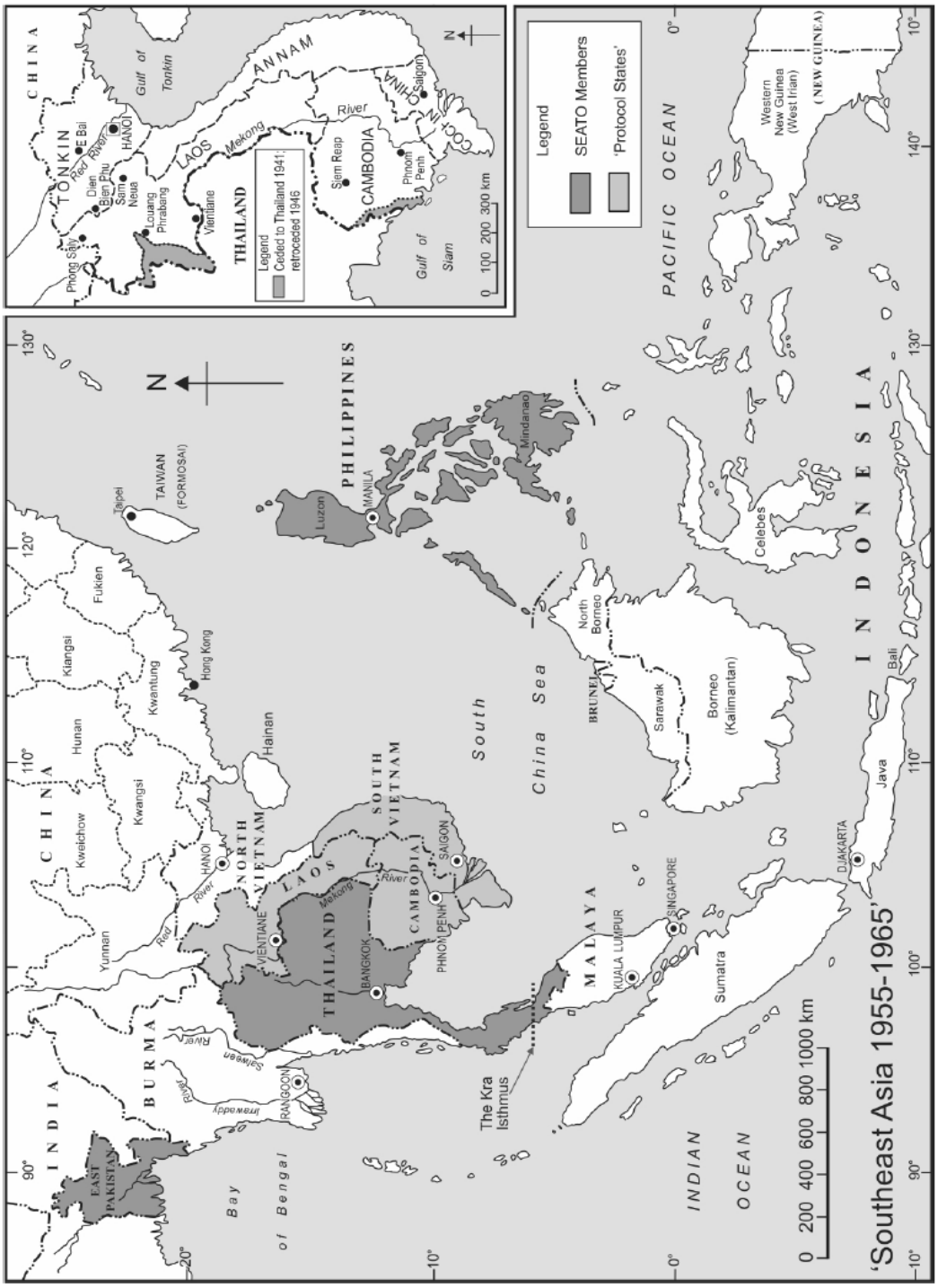
Map 1. French Indochina.

Source: Logevall, Fredrik. *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. New York: Random House: 2012, p.vii.



Map 2. Southeast Asia 1955-1965.

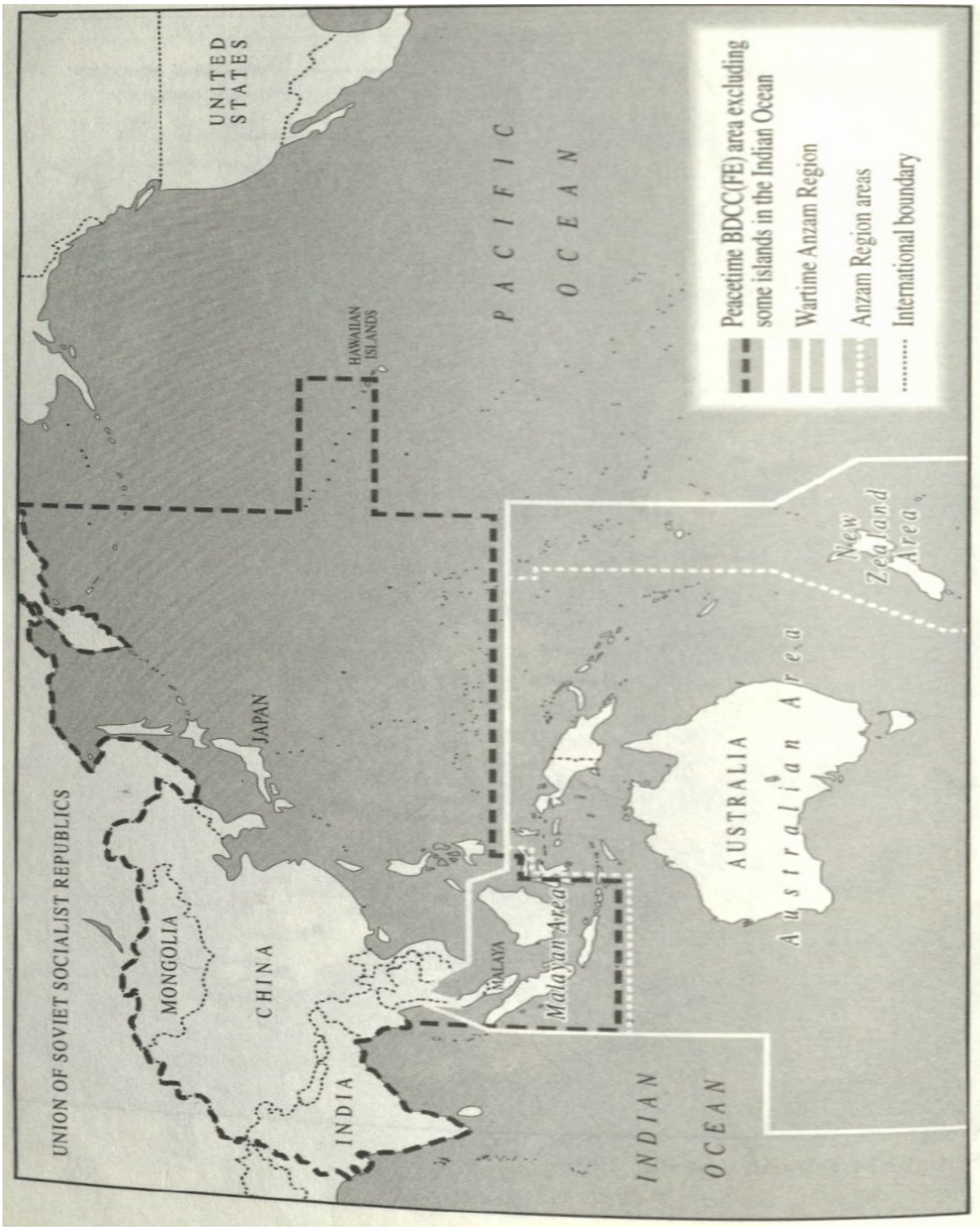
Source: Fenton, Damien. To Cage the Red Dragon: SEATO and the Defence of Southeast Asia, 1955-1965. Singapore: NUS Press, 2012, p.xi.



Southeast Asia 1955–1965

Map 3. BDCC and ANZAM Areas in the Early 1950s.

Source: Hack, Karl. *Defence and Decolonization in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore 1941-1968*. Richmond: Curzon, 2001.



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A4940 Cabinet Files, Menzies & Holt Ministries

A5954 Records Accumulated by Sir Frederick Shedden

A5818 Cabinet Office- Cabinet Submissions and Decisions, Seventh Menzies Ministry

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